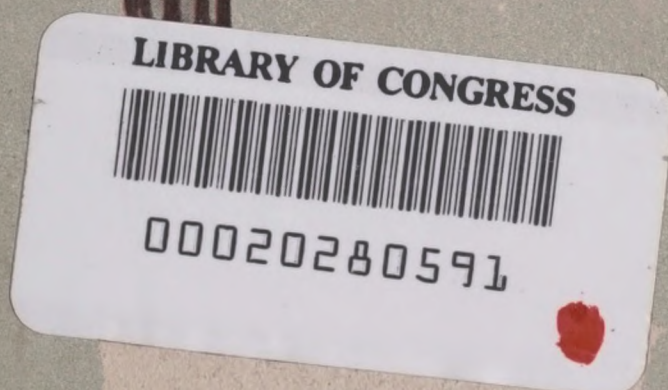


ROUND · · HILL FARM



ANNE E. STILLMAN MINER



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“‘I’m right glad to see ye’”

ROUND HILL FARM

BY
M. ANNETTE STILLMAN MINER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
H. BOYLSTON DUMMER

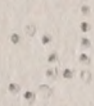


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NO. 1

To My Husband

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Round Hill Farm

CHAPTER I

THE MORNING sun filtered its way between the chimneys of the buildings that lined the city streets. A dry, northeast wind swept clouds of dust and rubbish down the busy thoroughfare as my aunt, Jane Lester, and I hurried along on our way to the station.

At the first corner a good-looking, stalwart young man seemed to be waiting for someone. "Um, there they come," he muttered.

"Why, Cousin Tom! We didn't expect you to go to the station with us—it's so ridiculously early," said I, surprised, but glad to see him.

"Well, I'm here. Give me that bag. But who ever heard of two women going to the country in April? It's a beastly month—all mud and slush!"

"Now, now; we have heard all that before.

If you are going to growl, I shall wish you had stayed at home."

"But who ever heard of anything so foolish? Everything will be cold, damp and dismal. Father is so cut up about your going and mother is actually in tears."

"Oh, please don't talk like that. It's absurd and so depressing. If we do not like the place, we can come back. Anyone would think we were going to a far country, when in reality it is only a few hours' ride on the cars."

"Yes, I know, but it's like you to stay a long time if you fancy the place. Here we are at the station."

He hurried to the express office and made sure that our trunks would go all right, then he bade us good-bye with the air of a martyr.

"Remember, I shall run up occasionally to see how you are getting along; and Aunt Jane, if you are homesick, let me know and I'll come up and help you make Ruth come back."

He was gone, and I boarded the north-bound train with a feeling of elation. "Now for the country!" I thought.

The time passed quickly after leaving the

city and we were soon out in the open country. I watched the shifting landscape from the car window and wondered how these hills and valleys would look in June.

Even the young man across the car did not interest me much, although our eyes met when I looked his way. I remembered afterwards of thinking he was a splendid looking man, and I had a dim impression that he was big and tall, and that his face was clean shaven. As I said, my mind was not on the people in the car, but on the landscape. It was the country that interested me. I was wondering how the farm would look where we were going.

Aunt Jane Lester's uncle had died and left her a little farm which he owned among the New England hills. I had never seen this uncle; our two families had not been on visiting terms. Why, I never knew, but I have heard it rumored that my grandfather and great-uncle both wanted to marry the same woman. Whatever the cause, Great-uncle never married or settled in any one place until he was quite old, when he decided to live on the farm Aunt Jane now inherited.

What he expected a maiden lady and her niece, who had lived nearly all their lives in a city, could do with a farm is something I have yet to learn. I think he must have had some misgivings on the subject himself, for the land was leased to an Ebenezer Palmer, the said lease expiring in one year more, although the house was my aunt's to occupy at any time she pleased, and the lawyer advised that she had better take possession as soon as possible.

It was some time before it was decided that we were to go. Aunt Jane loved her little city home. Moreover, she had always lived near her brother and his family—the family consisting of a wife and one son, Thomas Lester, Jr. She was contented and did not like the idea of making any change. But I wished to go; I was restless and wanted to try something new. So it was finally decided that she and I should go.

The farm house was all furnished just as Great-uncle had left it. All we had to do was to lock up our little city apartment and go with a few of our own belongings to the distant farm. Letters had been exchanged between this Ebenezer Palmer and Aunt Jane

until all arrangements had been made for our arrival.

All my relatives had reasoned with me on the untimeliness of April for a sojourn in the country. It was not fashionable to go so early. But truth forces me to state that I usually end by having my own way in anything I want to do.

I was wondering how the farm would look, when the conductor called out the name of the village which was our destination. I gathered what baggage fell to me and stepped out on the platform. The young man across the car had taken a suit case down from overhead and prepared to leave, so I concluded he had reached his destination, too.

I found a comfortable corner in the waiting-room for Aunt Jane, then went to look after the baggage. I was examining a heap of trunks, when a man from the opposite side of the platform hailed me.

"Say, Miss, be ye lookin' for Ebenezer Palmer?"

"Yes, he was to meet us at the station."

"Don't ye worry, he'll be here pretty soon. Somethin' has kep' him. I've got a wagon here for yer trunks, if you'll tell me which

they be. I'll try an' have 'em up to the farm afore dark. There, that's all, is it? Now, don't ye worry, for Ebenezer'll be here in the course of a few minutes."

The baggage disposed of, I walked up and down the platform several times, wondering about this Mr. Palmer. Finally, I grew impatient and went back to where the man was busy with the baggage and asked:

"Do you work for Ebenezer Palmer?"

"Yes, Miss, I've worked for him off an' on quite a number o' years."

I wanted to ask if he could tell me anything about this Mr. Palmer, when he anticipated the question.

"Lan', Miss, I've worked for him, an' I've known him quite a spell, an' he's about as shrewd as they grow 'em up in our part o' the country. He's got a big farm o' his own and improves the Lester farm besides. An' that ain't all. He's a slick one on a trade; the feller that cheats Ebenezer has got to git up pretty early in the mornin'. Still, Miss, everybody likes Ebenezer. He'll go out o' his way any time to do his neighbor a kin'ness, an' his wife is the best sort of a neighbor. They be a great help in times o' sickness.

There, Miss, that's him a-comin' down the street. Now, I tol' ye he'd be along pretty soon."

I looked and saw a large man in a two-seated carriage, driving a pair of spirited horses. As he came nearer I could see that he was smiling and had a jolly old face. I went back to the waiting-room where Aunt Jane was growing impatient at the delay.

Mr. Palmer drove up close to the platform and stopped. Aunt and I hastened out to where he stood holding the horses.

"Wa'al, ladies, be ye ole Mr. Lester's relations what's goin' up to the farm to live a spell?" he asked, after looking at us for an instant.

"Yes," I answered. "Mr. Lester was our great-uncle."

"Wa'al, if that's so, ye mus' be the ladies I'm a-lookin' fer. I'm Ebenezer Palmer. Ye got my letter sayin' I'd meet ye at the depot, didn't ye?"

"Yes, we were waiting for you," I answered, wishing he would stop asking questions and get on up to the farm.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here when the train cum in, but a lot o' things bothered me—but

that don't signify now. Ye git right into the carriage, an' I'll git ye up to the farm as soon as the hosses'll carry ye thar."

We climbed into the carriage and were driven slowly down the village street.

"Did ye understand about my havin' a lease o' the land fer a year, from the papers the lawyer sent ye?" he asked.

"Yes," said Aunt Jane. "It was explained sufficiently in the papers that uncle's lawyer sent us."

"Wa'al, that air lawyer was our son William. He looked arter all the ole man's business, an' did his writin'—the most of it. So ye'll understand that we be posted all about your great-uncle's property. Ye can give me yer orders an' I'll see that they be attended to."

"It was very kind of Great-uncle to remember us and we thank you, too."

"Don't mention it; I've been paid fer all I'll do, an' we be glad ye have cum to live in in the ol' house, an' wife, she'll be tickled nigh unto death to have some good neighbors livin' in the ole place."

As we were driving slowly along, I saw the young man from the train once more. He

entered an open door and ran lightly up the stairs. I glanced at the row of windows along the second story of the building and concluded that the stairway led up to several offices. I read the different signs hung in the windows; then I saw the young man's face once more at a window where a sign read—"Wm. Elliott, Attorney-at-Law." He was looking at our carriage, and I wondered in a vague way why we attracted his attention.

Mr. Palmer was still talking to Aunt Jane and was not paying much attention to his horses. Suddenly I became conscious of excitement along the street. All at once we were in the midst of a tangle of electric cars, motor cars, cabs and grocery wagons. It was impossible for Mr. Palmer to extricate us from the fast increasing jam, and I could see that he was greatly annoyed at his own carelessness.

From every direction the people kept coming. A cloud of dust swept by. There was a burst of martial music. The very air was full of exhilaration and expectancy. Immediately a parade in all its glory was seen approaching, and with shouts of "There it comes!" the boys rushed up the street.

Nearer and nearer it came. People rushed to the doors and windows. A moving mass swarmed around our carriage; we were surrounded on all sides as the crowd moved along with the show or whatever it was—I never found out—other things followed too fast.

As the “boom!” of the big drum became louder and closer, our horses began to fret. They were mettlesome at first, then they became wild with fright. They reared, they jumped, then reared again, growing more frightened every instant as the drum continued to beat and the band played on. I was not afraid, but every muscle was braced to meet the end. Every nerve was vibrating. The farm was forgotten.

“Don’t ye jump!” Mr. Palmer commanded us in a tone to be obeyed. He was using all his strength to keep the horses off the sidewalk. I held Aunt Jane’s hand tightly, waiting for I knew not what.

The horses crowded the carriage back against a telephone pole. There was a crash. A wheel had collapsed and my end of the carriage went down!

I rolled out on the sidewalk dragging Aunt

Jane after me. My head struck the sharp edge of the stone curbing. I felt sick and faint. Everything grew dark; but I knew all that was said or done.

"Lord o' Mighty! somebody look arter them women. I can't let go these pesky hosses; if I do, someone else will be killed sure," said Mr. Palmer, wildly excited for the moment.

Aunt Jane managed to get up. She was not hurt. She saw that I was, but she is a woman that can be depended upon in an emergency.

A man elbowed his way through the crowd, and Mr. Palmer exclaimed in a relieved tone of voice:

"William! Whar did ye cum from? Fur heaven sakes, take that gal out o' this. I guess her head mus' be busted. I see her when her head knocked agin that stun; better take her up to yer office just as quick as ever ye can."

While the old man was talking, someone gathered me up. The onlookers drew back and let us through, Aunt Jane following. He entered an open doorway nearby and I was carried up the stairs into a room and gently laid on a couch. Then he opened a window and turned on the heat. I was glad

to be quiet for my head was still aching. A faint odor of cigar smoke hung about the room and among the cushions. There was an air of comfort about the large office with its rugs and cushions and the sunshine made it inviting.

I could hear the music from the band coming faintly from up the street. The musicians seemed to have caught the joy and gladness that beamed from the faces all about them, and, with its overpowering splendor that filled the small boy's soul with delight, the street parade moved on followed by the crowd.

"Shall I go for a doctor?" inquired the young man.

"No, not yet," said Aunt Jane. "Will you please bring my bag from the carriage?"

He disappeared, and returned almost instantly with the bag.

Aunt Jane had loosened my wraps; my hat had fallen off.

He brought an overcoat from somewhere and covered me. Together they examined the bruise on my head, which was just over my right eye, and found that it wasn't as serious as it appeared. The skin was broken

just enough to allow the wound to bleed freely and made it look worse than it really was. I didn't care what they did; all I wanted was to go to sleep.

"If I had some water," suggested Aunt Jane.

He disappeared again and returned from the adjoining room with a sponge, water and towel.

Aunt Jane kept the damp sponge against the bruise. I lay perfectly still with my eyes closed, but the faintness and sickness at my stomach was disappearing. I was feeling better.

"Will you hold this sponge to keep the blood from running down her face while I look into my bag? I think I have some plaster."

He was quickly down on one knee in front of the couch, and taking the sponge from Aunt Jane, began gently to bathe my head. I opened my eyes a little to see who it was that had been so good to us in our distress and, to my surprise, I recognized, despite the solemn look, the man from the train! My eyes opened wide with surprise. We looked into each other's eyes for just

an instant. "Ah!" he breathed, as though greatly relieved.

"Do you feel more comfortable? Is your head better?"

"Yes, much; I shall be all right now." And I smiled comfortably and closed my eyes again.

It made me feel a little self-conscious to have him looking at me so closely as he still held the sponge lightly against my head. I was thinking what a queer freak fortune had played in bringing us together. What would come of it? Would we be friends, or would our interest end with our leaving the office? The accident would delay us probably an hour or so but it would not be a tedious wait. I was sorry Mr. Palmer's wagon was disabled, and I wondered how he would manage about our continuing our way. I was impatient to reach the end of our journey; still, my stay in this office was interesting, to say the least.

"Drink this, Ruth; it will make your head clear again."

I took the glass; the young man hesitated an instant, "Let me help you," and as he said this, slipped one arm under my pillow and raised me. I drank the contents of the

glass and sat up straight, as the supporting arm was removed. He brought a chair for Aunt Jane, then walked over to the window some distance away.

One query filled my mind—who was the young man? He had been very good to us, whoever he was, and I wondered why Aunt Jane did not introduce herself.

“Were you hurt, Aunt Jane?” I asked.

“Not in the least, although you held my hand so tightly I was obliged to follow. Now, I will see if I can find a little plaster for that cut.”

While she was looking for the plaster, I was busy with my eyes. It was just an ordinary office, clean and simply furnished. Books were everywhere, but not in the confusion one expects to find in a bachelor’s apartment. But, was he a bachelor?

Perhaps we were detaining a man who was impatient to get home to his family.

“We must go, Aunt Jane; we may be detaining this gentleman; perhaps he is in a hurry to get home to his family.”

“I beg of you not to hurry; my mother does not live in town, and I was not intending to go home tonight. Please stay until another

carriage can be procured; I do not think it will be long."

"Then he is a bachelor," I assured myself. "That was easily answered."

It occurred to me suddenly what a fright I must look. My hair was loose and very much dishevelled. I put my hand up to my head to feel its confusion and tried to look into a mirror that hung on the opposite wall over an office desk. It was tilted in such a way as to permit me to see the young man by the window. He was unconscious of my inspection, and I studied the reflection furtively as I arranged the loosened hair pins. He was looking at me as if in a dream. There was both admiration and mischief in the look, and I wondered if he had never seen a woman dress her hair before.

Someone was coming up the stairs; the door flew open and Mr. Palmer stood in the doorway.

"How be ye gittin' along? How's the gal? Has she come to her senses yit?"

"Yes, Mr. Palmer, I have come to my senses all right, and I am so sorry I have made so much trouble." I laughed aloud at the look of relief on the wrinkled old face. He came

into the room and the young man from the train walked over and closed the door.

"Wa'al, I'm glad ye be better." Then turning to the young man he asked, "Whar in canopy did ye come from, William? The last time ye wrote, ye was out West some-whar."

"I came on the train that brought these ladies. I had been in the office only a few minutes when I saw the accident from the window."

"Ye did; wa'al, I did need a bit o' help about then. I say, do ye know who these ladies be?"

"N-o, we haven't been introduced yet."

"Why, bless my soul! These ladies be old Mr. Lester's relations what's goin' to live in the ol' house; and, ladies, this is our son William."

"We are more than grateful to your son for helping us out of the crowd and for loaning us this office for a little while. Is this the lawyer we have been corresponding with?"

"Yes, that's him."

"Please do not thank me; it has been no trouble," the young man replied hastily. "It has made me very happy to know the ladies

‘what’s goin’ to live in the ol’ house,’” he added laughingly, his eyes dancing as he quoted with delicious imitation the old man’s words.

Aunt Jane murmured acknowledgment of the courteous reply.

“Yes,” I said, “it will be a joy and a relief to Mr. Palmer when he finally lands us safely at the farm. It was very ridiculous of me to faint, but that curbing was hard! Now, Mr. Palmer,” I continued, addressing the young man.

“His name ain’t Palmer, it’s Elliott,” said the old man. “I’m his step-father. His mother was a widder with this boy—let me think—he was nigh unto eight year old when—”

“How about the carriage,” interrupted the young man who evidently did not feel like hearing his own history just then, “have you made arrangements for them to continue their journey?”

“I have, an’ ye can go just as soon as ye feel like it. I hope we can finish the trip without any of us gittin’ our heads busted open. Say, young lady, how many stars did ye see about the time yer head struck the curbin’?”

"Billions, as near as I could make out!"

"Ye did!" chuckled the old man. "Wa'al, ye looked a bit limp when William was a-goin' upstairs with ye. Why, bless my stars, boy, I never was so glad to see ye before! I had too many responsibilities fur one ord'nary man about then."

"It was very kind of him to bring me up here away from that mob," and I smiled serenely up into his face.

"Yes, so good of you; but we must not trouble you any longer," Aunt Jane added.

"That's all right; it was no trouble; I was glad to be of service. Please say no more about it," he expostulated gallantly; "but if you wish to be at the farm before nightfall, you must be on the road as soon as possible."

The two men stood at the window talking as Aunt Jane and I prepared to leave, and I took a good look at them. Mr. Palmer, I should say, was about sixty years old, tall and muscular, with the stoutness that goes with middle age. His face was wrinkled and brown; one realized instantly that he had lived an outdoor life. He had a strong chin, while the mouth with its upturned corners indicated a keen sense of humor; his walk was

firm and his erect carriage told of strength. His clothes, somewhat worn, had a loose, easy fit; his cap with ear-lappits and his buckskin mittens showed that spring was not sufficiently advanced to discard the winter paraphernalia.

The two men were about the same height. The son was possibly twenty-seven or eight—tall, muscular and comely. He had a clear skin, his hands were brown but shapely and he appeared like a person accustomed to the ways of the world. I liked the strength in the broad shoulders that had carried me upstairs so easily, and his well-modulated voice was pleasant to hear; but the eyes—well, every time I saw them they were twinkling with merriment.

“Be ye a-goin’ up to the farm with us, William? There’s plenty of room. I’ve got another carriage with two seats.”

“If I do, I shall be obliged to come back again tomorrow, some time. There is a little business that must be attended to; I can’t put it off any longer.”

“Better come. It will do yer mother a sight o’ good even if ye can’t stay but one night.”

He hesitated a moment and then said, "All right, if it will not discommode the ladies any."

"I can't make out how you two women be related," continued Mr. Palmer.

"I am Miss Jane Lester, the one who has inherited the farm, and this is my niece, Ruth Lester. Her father was my brother. He and his wife both died when Ruth was a little girl and we have lived together ever since."

"Ah, that be easy 'nuf. Now I see; ye've been kind o' a mother and father both to her."

CHAPTER II

SOON WE were driving slowly along the busy street again. All signs of the parade had vanished.

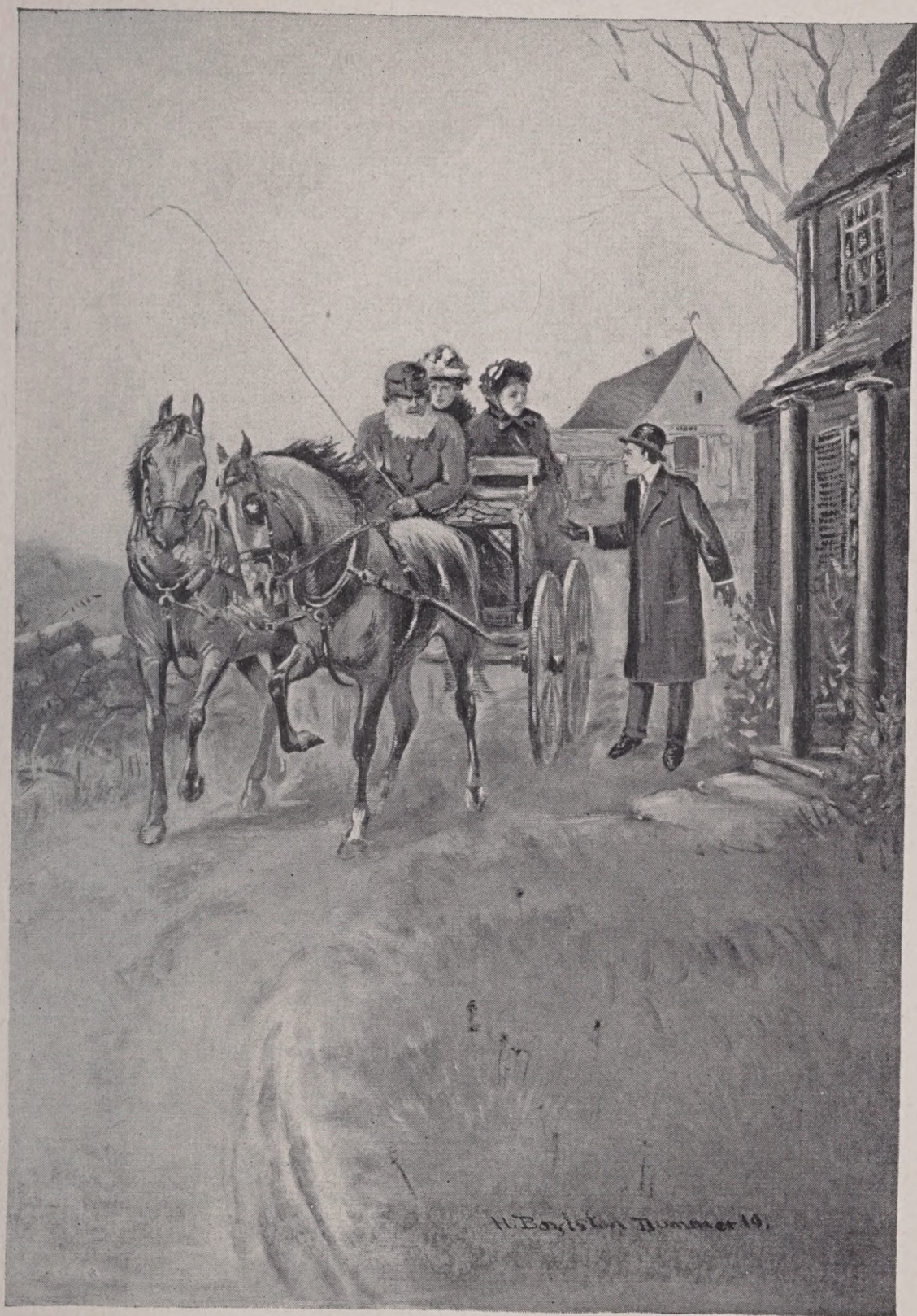
Aunt Jane rode along in silence after we left the village and were out in the open country.

"How dreary," she said. Everything looked brown, bare and water-soaked to her, but not so to me. Here and there were patches of green grass, where the April sun had lingered the longest; the buds on the maple trees were beginning to swell, and in some places their bare limbs were tipped with red.

At last the carriage wound up a long hill, and stopped in front of a great, rambling structure on the very top of the hill.

"Here we be," said Mr. Palmer.

Both men climbed out of the carriage; the young one came to our assistance, but I did not make any move to leave the carriage.



"The carriage stopped in front of a great rambling structure"

“Look, Aunt Jane, look! Our house and our view! Aren’t we glad we came!” (Mr. Elliott smiled in sympathy, but I did not pay much attention to him.) “Our view!” I repeated.

There in the distance stretched before me, as far as the eye could see, brown meadows sloping to a picturesque valley; dark green cedars grew along the plain; then up the steep hillside beyond the valley grew shrubs and evergreens and beyond these were the gaunt outlines of the leafless trees, in the haphazard grouping of the forest. The house was situated on a hill, so high one could look for miles over the country to the purple line of the far-away hills. And the old house—I loved it from the first moment I saw it.

“Ruth, will you come?” called Aunt Jane, with impatience.

Mr. Elliott helped me out of the carriage, and we followed the others into the house. I wished for good luck as I stepped over the threshold, and then I had a feeling that something good, some great happiness would come to me here in this old house. Perhaps it was childish and superstitious, but I did

have a peculiar feeling. Fate, or whatever it was, made it known to me that something waited for me here in this out-of-the-way corner of the world.

"I guess ye'll find the house right comfortable. I've had fires goin' in all the rooms like steam injines about all day," said the old man. "Ye two women needn't feel afraid, cuz I got a family livin' over the carriage house. James will help ye with the garden and sich, an' Susan will work in the kitchen and," he continued volubly, "I'll go call Susan now, if ye say so."

"Please do," said Aunt Jane; and the hospitable old man went out of the kitchen door to summon our help.

After the two men had taken their departure, we looked the house over more thoroughly and decided upon the rooms we were to occupy, and I commenced to unpack our belongings, singing "Home, Sweet Home" at the top of my voice.

When the expressman arrived with our trunks, I went out to call James, and I felt instantly that there was something queer about him. He looked as if he had seen better days. Whether it was his voice, his

manner, or the way in which he dressed, I was unable to determine then, but intuition or woman's natural instinct warned me that there was something out of the ordinary about James.

CHAPTER III

THE NEXT morning I opened my eyes and saw the sun shining in at the open window. Birds were singing sweetly in the shrubbery and I could hear Aunt Jane moving about downstairs. I jumped out of bed and dressed, now and then stopping to look out of the window. I could not seem to keep away from it. I could see a long distance; down, down, over miles of woodland and meadow. The air was delightful, and I resigned myself to the delicious languor of the spring day. I realized then that I had always wanted to live in the country.

Along the valley where the dark green cedar trees grew, hung a dense cloud of mist; but over this the sun was shining clear, radiant and still, and I thought I saw all the brightness and promise of a happy summer.

How long I stood there by the window dreaming, I knew not, when I became conscious of a commotion below. Aunt Jane

was pumping water at the well for our morning coffee. The old-fashioned, long-handled dipper floated on the water in the pail like a tiny ship at sea. She and I both saw Susan run out of the kitchen door (she had come in to help Aunt Jane get the breakfast) and hurry to the barn. I leaned out of the window, wondering what she was after.

Smoke was pouring out of the kitchen door and windows, growing thicker and blacker every instant. Two men came running from the barn, followed by Susan. They were Mr. Elliott and James. They disappeared through the kitchen door. Aunt Jane took the pail of water as far as the doorstep, where she abandoned it and then disappeared from my view through the kitchen door.

Then it occurred to me that the house must be on fire. Sounds of pounding and other noises came up to me. I hastily finished dressing and fairly flew down the front stairs, along the hall, opened the door that led into the kitchen and peeped in. It was the stove pipe that had come apart and the smoke was pouring out in clouds. I never saw so long a stove pipe anywhere, except in a country church. Great-uncle must have had peculiar

ideas on the subject of kitchen stove pipes. Be that as it may, it had come to grief, and the two men were trying to repair the damage.

Mr. Elliott stood on a chair facing me, holding up the hot end, his hands protected by Aunt Jane's clean kitchen apron, which was being scorched, judging from the odor. James was perched on the big wood-box. They both banged and hammered away at the pipe, but it refused to join. Mr. Elliott stood firm in his chair, but James put too much strength and energy into the job so that each time he struck the pipe the wood-box tipped dangerously. It was a most trying time; one end slipped in and the other out. Smoke continued to pour forth and made their eyes smart. They coughed and sneezed and muttered and banged.

James, a meek looking man I thought the night before, lost his temper and began to swear roundly and loudly. If Mr. Elliott did, I could not hear him above the din. I saw him look around—possibly to see if I was there—with a startled look on his face which changed to a sort of satisfaction when he resumed his work. All this time James was balanced on the edge of the wood-box as

it rocked perilously to and fro with every move he made.

"Now give it a good bang," he commanded, and struck the pipe a blow with all his might.

Down came several joints of the pipe. Soot and smoke poured out all over him and everything else. He lost his balance. The woodbox and contents tipped over and he fell in a heap on the floor, the soot still dribbling from the end of the gaping length of the pipe that hung in mid-air.

"Fire! Fire!" screamed Aunt Jane. Susan flew to the doorstep, seized the pail of water Aunt Jane had left there a few minutes before and threw the contents over the prostrate James.

Poor James! Tears of rage and pain ran down his cheeks. He coughed, choked and sneezed. After he regained his breath, oaths of the most startling kind poured forth from his mouth. Up and down the scale of profanity he went with the ease of a master musician. Susan told me afterwards that James had been a "sea-farin' man" in his younger days.

Mr. Elliott still stood on his chair con-

vulsed with laughter. This angered James the more, if such a thing were possible. He glared at the young man through streaks of nasty, greasy soot, his chin trembled, his eyes were like coals of fire. Then he turned his eyes on poor Susan. There was murder in the look.

"Woman! What do you mean by trying to drown me?"

"Please, sir, I didn't. I thought you was on fire."

"Thought!" he hissed through his teeth. "Thought! What a fool!" and he savagely kicked the chair Mr. Elliott was standing on. The young man, unprepared for the attack, lost his balance, swayed back and forth waving his arms wildly for a few seconds and then down he went in a ridiculous heap, sprawling over James, the soot and the wood-box. This was too much for the chagrined James. Both men were on their feet almost instantly. They glared at each other and there was rage in the eyes of each. James was a comical looking object; streaks of water and soot were running down his face and his hair looked as though his scalp were loose. Finally Mr. Elliott extended his hand.

"I am sorry, James, but you kicked my chair and made me add to your troubles." He went on with grim humor, "It was awkward of me, I know." Then he laughed a clear, ringing laugh that bespoke supreme confidence in his right to enjoy himself.

"All right, but if that stovepipe is ever fixed, you can get it done. I swear I won't touch it again," and James walked to the door angry and confused over the events of the last few moments.

"Oh!" wailed Aunt Jane. "Look at this kitchen! What a mess!"

Just then Mr. Palmer appeared on the scene. He met James at the door.

"Why, what in canopy ails ye, James? Ye look as if ye had been playing wild Injin on the war path to amuse the ladies. Ye got the war paint on rather streaked, didn't ye? Was the ladies amused?"

"Go to thunder!" roared James with a mad rush to the barn.

"Wa'al, an' here is William! Be ye in the play, too? Oh, I see! The stovepipe cum down. What a mess—soot all over everything! Where did the water cum from? Did the pipe belch water as well as soot an'

smoke? I never see the beat o' it. Do explain it to me, William."

"Oh!" wailed Aunt Jane again; "What a looking kitchen!"

"Yes'm, that's so. Does look rather messed up; but I never see a stovepipe act like that in a dry spell. But don't ye worry, ma'am. I'll have the stove man from town cum right up an' fix the consarned thing, an' I'll git a woman that'll be glad of the job to clean up the kitchen. There ain't no use in worryin' over things that can't be helped."

"But how are we going to make our coffee? We haven't had any breakfast yet," she was the picture of distress as she looked up into his good-natured face.

"That's easy. You an' the gal cum right over to our house. Wife'll be tickled nigh unto death to have ye."

"No, no! We couldn't think of putting her to so much trouble," replied Aunt Jane.

"Yes, ye can, too. I'll go right along now an' tell her ye're comin'. William, here, will wait an' show ye the way."

"Yes," responded the young man, assuringly. "Mother will be delighted to have you."

"I am sure I don't know what to do. I think I will call Ruth."

The subject of breakfast had interested me, so I had opened the door more than I realized. Mr. Elliott's quick eye saw me and he came towards the door. I flew along the hall but he was too swift for me. He came up and checked my flight.

"Caught, Miss Lester; caught in the act of peeping into your own kitchen. And now tell me, what have you to say for yourself?" and the triumphant face of young Elliott was smiling down at me.

"Nothing. I plead guilty."

"How much of the stovepipe episode did you witness?" he asked as we walked out on the veranda.

"Just about all of it!"

"Then you found out that James can be fluent in his conversation when he is excited."

"Oh yes, rather! If I had been in his place when Susan threw the water on him—well, James certainly did rise to the occasion grandly. Such spontaneous inventiveness I never heard before."

"Then you are not offended? Remember he is an old man. I am sorry, but he may

never get so excited again. Father has his mind set on keeping him. In other words, 'He is the man with the farm.' Father will be good to you if you get along with James. To have him go would annoy him very much. I thought I would tell you this and you can do as you like about talking to your aunt about it. Susan is different. I think she will be glad to earn a little extra money by helping your aunt."

"Yes, that will be all right. I won't pay any attention to him whatever." I was thinking about my meeting him the afternoon before.

"That will be doing my father a great kindness. Now if your aunt is ready, we will find out if my mother has any breakfast."

I went to the kitchen and found Aunt Jane. Mr. Elliott followed us down the path that winds through the garden. Beyond, the meadow and woodland lay quiet under the bright blue of an April sky. The sun was bright and warm. The breeze was soft and balmy. We walked in silence on through the sweet morning air listening to the soft, plaintive notes of a bluebird perched on the bare limb of a maple tree.

"Oh!" I thought, "all this morning has been lost." I had planned the night before to explore that little bit of woodland just beyond the meadow.

I thought it quite a walk to Mr. Palmer's that morning, but before many weeks were over it seemed only a stone's throw—I traveled the path so often.

Mr. Palmer met us at the gate smiling, as usual.

"Wa'al, hurry right along. Wife be a-waitin' for ye."

We followed him in. Mrs. Palmer welcomed us simply and kindly. She was a dear, sweet woman. I loved her almost instantly. She was rather tall, fair and slight, and quite an invalid.

What a breakfast! Hot rolls as light as down, coffee with cool, rich, yellow cream, cold chicken—and oh, wasn't I hungry! It seemed to me at one time as though I never would stop eating, but all good things have a way of coming to an end.

"Have ye got rested any arter yer trip?" inquired Mr. Palmer, after we had finished our breakfast and gone to the living room.

"Quite rested, thank you," answered Aunt Jane.

"Did Susan cum in to help ye before the stove pipe busted?"

"Yes."

"Do ye think she'll do to help ye right along?"

"I think so."

"Glad on't. I thought she'd do when I hired her; but James—wa'al, there's one thing agin James, he parts his hair in the middle, an' as I tol' wife, here—partin' the hair in the middle don't gen'ally go with farmin'. According to my calc'lations it shows that a man's like to be a leetle above his business."

"Maybe it will not this time," I laughed, and I saw William and his mother exchange amused smiles.

"How do ye like the looks o' the farm now ye have seen it? Does it cum up to yer idees?"

"It is better than I dreamed, and I dreamed it was about right."

"I wan'ter know!" Here he settled down in his chair, took out his pipe and began jamming the tobacco down hard. "I'm sorry

I didn't git over an' help when yer trunks cum las' night; but, ye see, I was busy with a hoss trade, so it slipped my mind, an' William, here, didn't know nothin' 'bout that they was comin'."

"James was there and helped, so we managed very nicely," I said.

"Ye see, when I git mixed up in a hoss trade, I'm like to forgit everythin'. I have to be pretty shrewd to keep every department of farmin' goin'."

"Hum!"—and he gave a little chuckling laugh.

"Ye see, I traded hosses with a Dago peddler, and that good-fur-nothin' son o' Italy cum back las' night an' wanted to trade back; said the hoss was balky an' lame, both. 'No, siree,' I tol' him, 'I didn't do no boy's swappin'. When I trade I allus 'bide by the cons'quences.' An' I vow, I couldn't help laughin' to see him go away down the road, a-cussin' an' a-threatenin' to have the law on me."

"Do you suppose he will?" I inquired, deeply interested in the story and Mr. Palmer both.

"No, I guess not. Can't no consarned son

o' Italy scare me, 'cause I've got the law in my own family. William, here, ye know, attends to all my law jobs free o' charge." The last he added with a grin at the young man.

I could not tell what the young man thought for he stood looking out of the window with his back to me, but there was an amused smile around the corners of his mother's mouth.

Soon after we bade them good-bye and went home across the fields.

"How do you like Mr. Palmer?" Aunt Jane asked when we were nearly home, and after a minute, I answered:

"I think I like him very much, and what is more to the point, he seems inclined to be very good to us."

"Yes, they certainly have been, to us, but life on a farm is lonesome at best."

"That depends," I said, "on one's own point of view—on one's mental condition."

"Yes, in a way I suppose it does."

"And," I continued, "my mental condition is such as to make me feel that I shall love every minute of the summer that is coming."

She smiled, and if she had any premonitions as to what the summer was to mean to her she kept them to herself. I, too, felt that there was something in store for us both.

CHAPTER IV

THE DAYS following were filled with joy and gladness. Daily I sent glowing letters to our friends in the city, elaborating vastly upon the wonders of the farm. All day long I was out-of-doors. The warm spring days charmed me. It was not surprising that I was entranced; the trees, the shrubs and the flowers were offering their greatest attractions.

Mr. Palmer's family and we soon became excellent friends. We ceased to care about how we were dressed, or at what time of day or by which door we entered each other's houses. Mr. Palmer often took me with him when he went on long drives about the country. They were constantly making plans for our comfort and happiness. We slid easily into a new life, and it was a very simple one, far from the din and hurry of the city and from the world of conventionality.

Aunt Jane was housekeeper and I was



H. Boylston Summer 10.

"My ccusin Tom Lester sent me a beautiful collie dog"

farmer or gardener or anything else I chose to be. She and Mrs. Palmer spent many hours together. Oftentimes she would go with me about the farm, but she was not interested in the wonderful things that were growing all around us so I gave up asking her to go. Then my cousin Tom Lester sent me a beautiful collie dog as a companion. We soon became great friends. His look of wisdom was comical when I explained to him my plans for the summer. I preferred to talk to the dog rather than to James, for if I changed my plans the man had a way of muttering to himself, and very often I could make out the word "fool" and "all women know."

One warm afternoon Aunt Jane and I were busy on the veranda. We were talking about Great-uncle, and Aunt Jane was wondering if he had any money. It seemed as though he should have had as the farm seemed to pay under Mr. Palmer's management.

"Susan says," she remarked, "Mr. Palmer took good care of our uncle in his last sickness, and she has reasons to believe that Uncle gave Mr. Palmer all his money;

she says that all the neighbors thought our uncle had quite a large fortune."

"Did they? Well, I don't care whether it was large or small. It was good of him to remember us and give us this farm. We never did anything for him; we can at least be thankful for what we did get." A vision of uncle dying all alone when his kin were but a few hours' ride away was one I could not contemplate with any degree of comfort.

I happened to look up at James as Aunt Jane went into the house. He was looking intently at me. His blue eyes had a way of fastening themselves on one's face and producing a feeling not easily shaken off. He had been busy digging around the vines by the veranda. Again I realized that there was something about the man that made me feel queer. He served us with a grave deference and I liked his humility. Still, there was a bewildering something. He did not resemble his sister Susan in any way. She was an ideal servant, but James was not very energetic. Then he made me feel as though he had been a man of the world from his youth. He was tall; his features were good; he must have been remarkably handsome in

his younger days. I wondered where Mr. Palmer had found them. Susan avoided the question when she was asked where she lived before this summer. Mr. Palmer must have considered them trustworthy people or he would not have engaged them to work for two lone women. I felt convinced that whatever the mystery was the Palmers did not want us to know.

"Well," I thought, "I am not afraid. I will wait. Aunt Jane evidently has not the feeling about James that I have and I will say nothing about it to her for fear of making her nervous. She don't seem to take any notice of him whatever. The summer has only begun," I mused. "Farming may turn out a very exciting occupation. I shall certainly keep my eye on James. A mystery will make life on the farm more interesting. I think I should rather have a mystery than a ghost, as we are two lone women in a big house. Of course, I have that silver-trimmed revolver that Cousin Tom gave me before we left the city, but that would not help much in the case of a ghost."

William Elliott had deserted his rooms in the city and had taken upon himself the privi-

lege of bringing our mail. Occasionally Mr. Palmer would come over and help in our garden, observing once that "James has done very well so far if he does part his hair in the middle!"

One day James and I were working in the garden transplanting a bed of little zinnias. Suddenly there came up one of those wind storms such as people living on a hilltop become familiar with. It swept over the garden as though let loose from somewhere all at once, upsetting the basket of flowers and bending the young plants close to the ground. Off went James' hat, his smoothly arranged hair tossing about in confusion, and as it lifted up the long locks I saw snow-white hair underneath!

"The blond hair, then," I said to myself, "is part of the mystery. He wears a wig! But why did the Palmer family keep us in darkness?"—for I felt convinced that they knew. This added intensity to my curiosity.

The third of a succession of rainy days was just ending. I built up a cheerful fire in the open chimney to dry up the dampness. The lamps were lighted and I was curled up in a large arm-chair that Great-uncle used to

sit in (so Susan said) and which Aunt Jane had re-upholstered in chintz with great red poppies running in confusion all over it. I was leaning back with my hands folded lazily in my lap listening to the wind and rain outdoors, well satisfied with the warmth and coziness of the room. As I watched the fire blaze up, sending up showers of sparks, I became lost in a reverie. My thoughts drifted back to Great-uncle and I wondered why he gave Aunt Jane the farm and whether we were pleasing him—if he knew—by living in the old house, when I was roused by footsteps on the veranda. Aunt Jane hurried to the door and there stood Mr. Elliott, very wet with a bundle of letters and papers. He tried to take his hat off but the gale did that for him and put out the light.

“Come in—and hurry!” cried Aunt Jane, good-naturedly.

He came into the hall and she closed the door behind him. I think she was particularly glad to see him this evening and hoped to have company on so lonesome an evening.

“I am very wet. It is too bad! May I go to the kitchen and take off this dripping

coat? I know the way—then I can attend to this mail.”

“I wish you would,” I said, still sitting in the great chair.

He disappeared down the hall to the kitchen while Aunt Jane hurried to re-light the lamp. In a minute he was back again.

“Ah!” he said, as he stood in the doorway and looked into the room. “How you have changed this room. It does not look like the same place. You have made it a perfect lighthouse to Mother. I do not think you realize how it cheers her to look over and see the blinds open and sometimes the windows up, and in the evening, a bright light shining out.”

“I have tried to make it a fit place to live in,” said my Aunt Jane.

“Poor Aunt! she is like the hen that mothered the little duck.”

“It has been rather damp even for ducks. You find these rainy days rather long, don’t you?” he asked, as he sat down in a big chair opposite me which Aunt Jane had moved close to the fire.

“No, I haven’t yet, but Aunt Jane does.”

“Now Ruth, you know the doctor said

you must be out in the sun and air all you can, so I am willing to stay as long as it is necessary." And she began poking the fire with the tongs.

"Can't I do that for you?" Mr. Elliott asked, reaching for the tongs and at the same time casting a quick, anxious look at me.

"No; what the fire needs is more wood."

"Can't I get it?"

"You sit still. I'd rather get it myself," replied Aunt Jane as she started up and hastened to the kitchen.

"This is what I call cozy," Mr. Elliott remarked as he stretched his feet to the fire and settled down with an air of contentment such as one feels before a wood fire in an open chimney and listens to the wind and rain outside.

We sat in silence and watched the fire for a minute; then I said, "I'm afraid James is a lazy servant."

"Why?" he asked, looking up in surprise.

"Because he will let Susan and me bring in wood until our backs almost break and never offer to help."

"I will have someone sent over to do it."

"Why not speak to James? He's the one to do it."

"W-e-l-l," he drawled, hesitatingly, "I do not like to interfere with any of father's arrangements." There was a twinkle of mischief in his eyes.

"Oh, I understand. You are afraid James will disarrange that beautiful blonde wig!"

"A what? I beg your pardon, but do you mean to tell me that James wears a wig?"

"Yes, his hair is as white as snow under that blonde work of art."

"Ah, Miss Lester, if there is anything funny you are sure to see or know about it."

"Why do you suppose he wears a wig?" I asked, as I glanced at my companion.

"Maybe he wears it to improve his looks. Possibly he is contemplating matrimony—who knows?" and he laughed a wholesome, cheering laugh.

"Who knows?" I repeated to myself, "You do but will not tell." Aunt Jane entered the room with the wood at this juncture and she and Mr. Elliott talked about her beloved city for a little while, then she let him out the kitchen door, for it was more sheltered from the wind and rain.

When they went to the kitchen something impelled me to go to the window and look out. The room I was in had no other light than that reflected from the fire for Aunt Jane had taken the lamp. A faint sound arrested my attention and the next instant a shaft of light from the kitchen shone on the figure of a man moving stealthily off the veranda, and I felt quite sure it was James. Who was he watching—Mr. Elliott or us?

I sat down in the chair again by the fire greatly perplexed with this latest development. He must be employed by someone to watch our movements—there must be something of value in the house. This seemed a foolish idea and I decided to bother about it no longer that night. I went to bed, but not to sleep. For a long time I speculated upon what had occurred during the evening. I recalled Mr. Elliott's merry laugh and the mischief in his eyes when I told him that James wore a wig; then the day the stovepipe fell and he said that his father was interested in James and would be much annoyed to have James go away.

I thought of appealing either to Mr. Elliott or Mr. Palmer but dismissed the

idea and never regretted the decision. I was not afraid of James. Somehow I was sure he meant no harm to us; yet, I felt that it meant treachery or evil of some kind and determined more strongly than ever that I would keep my eye on him and find out if I could. During the day I saw James often. I was on the alert for any sign of perturbation in him, but I was disappointed. He went about his work as placid and innocent-looking as usual. I saw that I must wait until he should throw himself more boldly into the game. In the meantime I decided to question Susan.

After a long talk on other subjects I asked her where James learned his deferential way of addressing people.

She was silent a few seconds, and then as though weighing every word, she replied.

"I think, Miss Lester, his being a sailor in his younger days made him used to people. Perhaps you don't know that he sailed to a great many far countries, but," and with a flash of anger in her eyes, "he don't dare to put on his high and mighty ways to me! He was just as poor as other people and I know he eats just as much cranberry sass without

any sugar in it as ever I did—so now!” With this parting outburst of wrath, she went off into the house.

It seemed that there was to be no help from Susan in solving the mystery which surely involved this strange character.

CHAPTER V

"JUNE," EBENEZER Palmer said, "is the month for garden sass to grow and roses to bloom."

I had watched the sowing of the grain in the field; the planting of the vegetable and flower garden. I had asked all the questions I could think of and learned a few things—not many but enough to make me feel encouraged—and I was still in love with the farm.

One day Mr. Palmer invited Aunt Jane and me over to his house in the evening to hear a "talkin' machine." Finding out that the old man had never heard one, we decided to go, feeling sure his remarks would be worth hearing. We walked over in the early evening. A number of people were sitting around the room, several of whom I had never seen before. The man that owned the machine sat by a table where the instrument was placed all ready to begin.

Mr. Elliott came in and sat down just behind Aunt Jane and me. He talked in a low tone to us until the music began, and, as he caught a glimpse of his father's face he whispered, as an amused smile spread over his own:

"You want to keep an eye on Father. He will be great fun. This is something new to him and he is likely to get somewhat excited."

After the machine was started Mrs. Palmer motioned to her husband to come and sit down.

The old man's face was a study from the first.

"I vum!" he ejaculated, "It do beat all! Say, Wife, it's most human, ain't it?"

But his wife did not answer, so he appealed to me.

"Did ye ever hear the beat o' that?"

"Never!" I breathed, not daring to look at anyone.

"The old man's taking it pretty hard," the son whispered close to my ear.

"Everybody Works but Father," sang the machine, and the look on the old man's face made us both giggle disgracefully. Nearly everybody in the room began to hum and keep

time with their feet. The machine kept such excellent time that each foot came down with the same jubilant beat.

"Moses an' the prophets! Warn't that able!" exclaimed Mr. Palmer. "That's all right. Say, Mister, play that 'un ag'in, will ye?"

"Do keep still, Ebenezer!" I heard his wife say in an undertone, after which he listened in comparative silence while the machine ground out selection after selection. It was next to impossible, though, for him to smother all expression, for low murmurs of approval continued to issue from his mouth while delight and appreciation shone in his eyes, and his face changed from mirth to sadness with the variations in the music.

"Them songs do make me think of ol' times. I was thinkin' as I sot here list'nin', what some of th' old men (I mean the men that was ol' when I was young) would say if they could cum back an' hear this machine perform all kinds of music an' sing all kinds of songs."

"I guess they would be astonished," replied someone.

"Yes, I wouldn't be s'prised. Ye've heard

of old Deacon Jot?" he inquired of Aunt Jane.

"I don't think I ever did," she answered.

"Ye never? Wa'al, he was a great han' to talk in meetin'. He had an idee he had more faith'n any other livin' man. I remember one evenin' when he got pretty excited and warmed up to his subjec' some o' the young people was makin' a noise on the back seat, an' there was quite a proper bunch o' young folks about that time in the church, an' I guess the noise disturbed him. He turned 'round so he could face 'em an' shouted—'Brethren, ye mus' have faith—faith, I tell ye!' and then he stretched out his long arm and p'inted to the young people an' said, 'Brethren an' Sisters over thar, some o' ye that ain't got no faith'll be glad t' catch on to my ol' long coat-tail when I go up!' I guess he'd grab somebody's coat-tail if he was here and could hear this machine perform all sorts o' music and talk like humans, 'cause I guess he would think it was persessed with th' evil one."

"Now, Ebenezer," said his wife, gently, "do let someone else do some talking."

"Hum, you're just as green as I be, only

you don't let on," rejoined the old man, a little piqued by his wife's remonstrance. Mrs. Palmer wisely made no reply and merely folded her hands in her lap and closed her eyes. Ebenezer, however, notwithstanding the quiet rebuke was thoroughly aroused; he was having an exciting time and could not be silent.

"Ever heard one o' them machines before?" he asked Aunt Jane.

"Yes, quite often in the city."

"Ah, William said ye must have when I tol' him I'd invited ye folks over. Wa'al, I've heard tell on this machine before; my wife's sister, Phoebe Ann (she's housekeeper for one on them big bugs at Newport), says as how they've got one down there. But I swan, it do make me feel kin' o' queer—" he added, after a moment of thoughtful silence—"to hear folks a-talkin' that ain't here and ain't no idee that their voice be, nuther!"

The concert was over, the machine and the people were gone and Aunt and I were just going when someone knocked at the door. Mr. Elliott opened the door to see who it was. There was light enough for me to see my

cousin Tom Lester standing on the doorstep. I was just opening my mouth to speak when I noticed the two men looking at each other intently, and with evident surprise in his voice Tom exclaimed, "Will!"

"Tom!"

Each pronounced the other's name in astonishment. Then Tom stepped up and put his hand on Mr. Elliott's shoulder and said with gladness in his voice and face:

"By jove, Elliott, it is really you, isn't it? Say you're glad to see me, old man!"

"So I am; what a delightful surprise! Come in. Where did you come from?"

I looked on wonderingly. Here was another mystery to be explained. Truly farm life grew more exciting every day.

"Oh, you lost heathen, I've found you at last!" exclaimed Tom, seemingly overcome anew, and still grasping Elliott's hand.

"Not much of a find," said Mr. Elliott smiling joyously into Tom's face.

"Let me be judge of that," said Cousin Tom. Then he saw us and smiled. "There isn't anything strange about my being here. I came visiting my cousin and aunt. The man over at the farm said he thought I would

find you here. He told me how to get here and here I am."

"Yes, we are here," said Aunt Jane. I had gone up to him as he spoke and was holding his hand in my glad impulsive way. He and I had been brought up together; he was all the brother I ever knew. His father was my guardian, but the real work of looking after me fell on Tom's broad shoulders and no real brother could have been any more faithful than this one and only cousin of mine.

"Who be yer friend, William?" inquired his father.

"My old college friend, Tom Lester. You remember hearing me speak of him, do you not?"

"Sure I do! And we be right glad to see ye. Ye remember hearin' William tell about him, don't ye, wife?"

"Yes, I remember," and she smiled one of those rare sweet smiles that made one love her instantly. Mr. Elliott stepped over and said:

"This is my mother, Tom. I want you to know her."

"Did ye say ye was related to these ladies?" interrupted the old gentleman.

“Yes, they are my aunt and cousin. Father sent me up to see how they were getting along and to find out if Ruth wasn’t homesick. He thought she might be ready to return by this time.”

“No, your father is mistaken for once. I am not ready to leave the farm.” Just then I happened to look over Cousin Tom’s shoulder and my eyes encountered young Elliott’s. There was an expression in them that I did not understand. He looked pale and as though he had been physically hurt. He dropped his eyes as though he did not want me to look at him. I wondered what had happened to make him look like that. It could not be Tom’s arrival, for he was truly glad to see him. “It must be something serious,” I thought, “to affect him so,” yet what it was I could not imagine.

Shortly after this Aunt Jane said we must be going. Cousin Tom said:

“Walk over with us, Will. I want to talk with you later.”

Mr. Elliott consented and we walked along the dusty country road. There was a little moon, the stars shone brightly. The peeping frogs were holding a concert down in the

valley and a light breeze from the south stirred the foliage of the trees and shrubs along the roadside. Cousin Tom did most of the talking. When we arrived at our door Aunt Jane and I went in. Tom said that he and Will would smoke for a while and he would join us shortly. Mr. Elliott led the way to the seat under the trees in the orchard. It seemed strange to me why they had not heard from each other if they were so friendly. I remembered then that Cousin Tom had a friend named Elliott when he was in college, but I had not thought of it until tonight. In about an hour Tom came in.

"Well," I said, "so you know our neighbor!"

"Yes, Will and I were college chums—real friends. It's funny that we haven't heard from each other in over three years. I don't quite understand it myself. I knew that his people lived in this part of the country somewhere. He never said much about his people, but I knew his father died when he was little and that his mother married again and that they did not have much money."

"Then you approve of him as a friend and neighbor?"

"Of course I do. He was the best friend

I ever had. Out-and-out honest, hit or miss. If he thinks he'll ever let three years slip by again and I not hear from him he's mistaken that's all. But you like him, don't you, Ruth?"

"I like every member of the Palmer family. Money will never repay all the nice things they have done for Aunt Jane and me."

"That's right. Now I feel better about you and Aunt Jane staying here alone. Mother has worried and Father thought it time you came home. I had my orders to bring you back."

"Do, Tom, get them to let us stay without any more fuss. I have had a glorious time so far. If you will only do this for me I will make it up to you some time. You, yourself, know Mr. Palmer and his family and you can tell your father and mother how good they are to us and that Susan is good, competent help. Then there is James if we need any help other than Susan can give."

"I'll think about it," was all I could get him to promise. "You might remember I haven't seen much of the farm. It was dark when I arrived. Tomorrow I will look the place over and make up my mind."

CHAPTER VI

THE NEXT morning, immediately after breakfast, Cousin Tom went over to see his friend Elliott again, and I was busy helping Aunt Jane for a while. Then I went to the veranda. I was well pleased with the weather, for first impressions influence so many people. I was anxious that Tom should like the place well enough to come again. Then I saw Tom and Mr. Elliott strolling leisurely up the garden path. They were two stalwart youths, and I felt proud that they were either kin or friend. Their unexpected meeting the night before was an exhilarating pleasure to both. Although utterly unlike in temperament, yet between the two one found all that was interesting in men; the faults and virtues of each were along different lines, yet balanced perfectly.

"Now," said Tom, sitting down on the steps beside me, "I have made Elliott, here, confess that business can be put off for a few

hours; so with your consent and invitation, he will go with us to inspect the farm."

"Oh, please do!" I begged. "I am in need of all the eloquence you possess; I want Tom to like the place well enough to come again."

Mr. Elliott's brow puckered; puzzled uncertainty expressed itself in his face; he seemed afraid of being in the way.

"Please do!" I urged again.

"Yes, come along, old man," said Tom, "the grass is dry. I am anxious to see this bit of Eden by daylight."

So we walked leisurely along from one place of interest to another. Most of the time, when the path was wide enough, I walked with Tom on my right and Mr. Elliott on my left. They kept up a constant display of wit, ridiculing everything I called their attention to; and Tom would climb up and look into the little bluebird's nest in an old, empty paint keg that hung in the apple tree by the roadside. We visited the garden, and inspected the hens and chickens. The wide, stretching country was fresh and green; the meadow larks were singing; and the odors that tell of spring were wafted to us from every quarter. Then we wandered to the

lower meadow to look at the great corn-field, where Mr. Palmer was busy with his men. He saw us, came and leaned against the stone fence, and inquired:—

“Wa’al, young man, how do ye like the looks o’ the farm?”

Tom replied, “I do not know much about a farm, but it looks all right and Ruth has taken a great fancy to the place.”

“The gal is all right. She’s improved a sight since she came, an’ she’ll make a grand, good farmer arter a leetle more experience; but some o’ her questions tickled me nigh unto death; they had the city ignorance stamped on every last one o’ ’em. Still, as I said, she’ll be all right arter more experience.”

Tom and Mr. Elliott exchanged amused looks; they were both eagerly drinking in the old man’s talk, and it was with difficulty that they suppressed a laugh.

“Don’t you think she is over-zealous?” asked Tom.

“Not a mite,” answered the old man, “I think it a grand idee for a woman to take an interest in things that grow out o’ doors; an’ I was kind o’ afraid she’d be lonesome, ’cause one day on the farm is kind o’ like

another; but dreary—no; her spirits an' face has been like a bit o' clear sky ever since she cum."

"I see she manages to have her way here the same as she does in the city," laughed Tom.

"Say, young man, I'd like to inquire, seein' ye be from the city, and know all about fashions, if it ain't fash'nable no more fer gals to wear bonnets or hats or somethin' o' the kind on their heads. Miss Ruth, here, I notice, mos' allus goes 'round bareheaded."

"I believe hats are rather out at present," laughed Tom. He was delighted with the old man's fun.

"She do beat all the gals I ever knew. I should think she'd get so tanned up she'd look like a ham that'd been forgot, an' left in the smoke-house till it was well seasoned."

"Do I look like a ham?"—and I walked up close to the stone fence so he could get a good look at me.

"No, that's the beater on't. Ye don't look like a ham."

"What do I look like, then?"

"Wa'al, if I was a young man I'd tell ye mighty quick how you look; but law sakes,

Miss Ruth, ain't ye got no looking-glass?"

"Yes, I have a looking-glass, and furthermore, I am glad you are not a young man—you are much nicer as you are," and I walked away.

"Thar, now! Ye do reconcile me to my gray hairs. Say! what's yer hurry? I'd rather talk than hoe corn any day."

"No, I must go; Aunt Jane will be looking for us."

Tom and Mr. Elliott followed, busily talking about their affairs; and in the late afternoon Mr. Elliott went with Cousin Tom to the station, and it was some time before I saw either of them again.

CHAPTER VII

A WEEK or more after Cousin Tom's departure, Aunt Jane and I were out on the veranda enjoying the evening air. I was walking slowly to and fro thinking and making plans to entertain my friends and relatives, for Cousin Tom had promised to come and stay with us when he had his vacation in August. As an inducement and to influence him to come, I told him I had written to my friend, Eleanor Roberts, inviting her to visit me that month. We both loved Eleanor, although I do not think he had told her so. At any rate, they both promised to stay the month of August with us.

"Oh," I thought, "why can't that vacation be now, in June, when the breezes bring the odor of roses, fresh and sweet with dew from the garden! If I were Cousin Tom I would take my vacation now."

At this point in my meditation I looked up and saw Mr. Palmer coming up the gar-

den path. He was limping badly and had a cane in each hand. Aunt Jane and I both hastened down to meet him, anxious to know what had befallen him. We sympathized although we had a struggle to keep from laughing.

"Ye see," he began, "I went over east, sum ten miles or so, lookin' for sum young pigs. Wa'al, I found a man what had sum likely lookin' ones, about four months old—just what I wanted. We dickered a spell on the price. He wanted four dollars an' I offered three. Wa'al, to make a long story short, we fin'ly split the dif'rence—I gin him three an' a half and said I'd take 'em right home with me, for I was afraid he would back out. So we put each one in a bag an' loaded 'em inter my wagon and I started fur home. Them was the likeliest lookin' pigs I'd seen this year. I jus' couldn't help buyin' 'em nohow.

"Wa'al, as I said, we put 'em inter a bag and loaded 'em inter the wagon an' I started fur home. I drove along towards home thinkin' what a bargain I'd got and feelin' mighty pleased with myself and my day's work, an' like the pesky fool that I was,

didn't do as Lot's wife did—look 'round an' see if they was all right. But arter a while I fin'ly did look 'round when I was most home, an' if two o' the pesky critters wasn't gone! Now, I hadn't no idee when it happened; it might be a mile back and then ag'in it might be the whole tenfur all I knowed. I thought a spell and fin'ly decided to turn the ole hoss 'round an' go back and look fur 'em. I guess I'd gone back about a mile when I see one on 'em in a big meadow, runnin' 'round kind er to play like. I hitched the ole hoss to a bar post and started in to ketch the rascal.

“Now, I'm a big man and clumsy besides, and take a big meadow, and ag'in a spry young pig I don't think any real, good bettin' man'd put up much money on me. Wa'al to go on, we started in on the race. Sometimes he was ahead and once in a while I cut off a corner and gained on him a bit. We kep' this up fur some time 'till I was a-losin' my breath, and was about ready to call off the race, when all to once he either got confused or skeered, I don't know which, an' he just turned and cum right towards me. I put on a bit more speed—in fac' I let out

all the speed thar was in me—when Providence or somethin' else 'most as powerful, stubbed my toe, and I fell right onter that pig! Prophets of the wicked! how it did knock the wind outer both of us; but the next I knowed I had that pig by the leg an' I managed to hol' on till I got anuther bag an' got him inter it, over in the wagon. An' lame—I've been so lame I've had to walk with two canes ever since."

"Did you capture the other pig?" I asked.

"No, an' I hope I never shall if it's goin' to lame me up as this one has. I'm too ole to chase pigs," and he groaned as he moved to an easier position on the veranda steps. "Thar, now, I guess I'll be a-goin'. Just thought I'd hobble over an' see how ye was a-gittin' along.

"How is the garden gittin' along; James has worked pretty smart, ain't he?"

"Oh, the garden is all right." Then remembering Mr. Elliott said that his father would not like it if we objected to James, I added, "Yes, the planting is all done; all we have to do now is to fight the weeds."

"Wa'al, I'm glad ye be satisfied with yer help. Now I must be a-goin'. Do cum over."

After he was gone I sat and brooded a long time about James. It seemed to me that I could not wait patiently until one of the Palmer family saw fit to solve the mystery.

"Every Eden has its serpent sooner or later," I thought, and James seemed to be the serpent in ours. To add to my annoyance and worry, he had been following Aunt Jane lately; not so that anyone else noticed it, but I, who was on the alert for every move of his, was aware that he showed an interest in the part of the house she inhabited. He had watched the place like a detective, and as I thought of it, I wondered what had become of Great-uncle's money. Surely he must have had something besides the farm.

It seemed to me that being his relatives, we had a right to know and it seemed to me strange also that no one exhibited the least interest in this point, but rather appeared to take it for granted that the farm was all he possessed. If James was a detective why did they not search the house before we came and when no one lived there? Perhaps they did and could not find what they were confident was hidden away somewhere and thinking that we might accidentally come upon it,

they put James there to watch us. He certainly must be looking for something of value or he would not be so interested in the house—of that I felt convinced. This idea took a strong hold on me.

Heretofore I had been so occupied with the farm that I had given little heed to the house and what it contained. Now, however, it suddenly possessed an unusual attraction. I had heard of mysterious hiding-places. Perhaps we had a secret panel, a hidden hand, a cave, a double floor in the attic, a false back to a picture, a loose stone in the chimney, a secret or locked drawer in an old table or desk—the very thing! In the old desk we moved from Great-uncle's sleeping room to the living room was a small drawer we had been unable to open. Either it was caught or locked—in any case it had baffled all attempts Aunt Jane or I had made to open it without damaging the desk. Perhaps it had a secret spring.

I went and looked at it, examined every part of it carefully, tapped the wood in several places softly with a hammer hoping to find a recess where there was every appearance of solidity, but I failed to find

anything of the sort. My faith was not shaken though. I felt even more confident that this drawer was the key to the mystery that hung around us. I was tempted to force it open but in the end could not make up my mind to damage the desk which I discovered I cherished in memory of Great-uncle. No, I would wait until Tom came; then I would get him to open it. In the meantime I would pursue my researches further, and in other parts of the house. I pondered these things with newly awakened interest and wondered why I had not seriously considered Great-uncle's money before.

The next day I ascended the narrow stairs that led up to the attic. The sunlight streamed in through the window and searched the farthest corners under the eaves. I opened the window, moved an old chair close to it, and sat down and looked the attic over carefully.

The floor was bare and dusty. It was a typical attic, with its discarded furniture, battered trunks, boxes of various kinds, an old spinning wheel, and at one end of the room an antique hand loom. The people of long ago came back to me as if by magic. I

could imagine a stately colonial dame sitting at that loom smiling over her work, moving dexterously that wooden shuttle between the warp; I could hear the bang, bang, of that wooden lathe as she beat in each strand or thread, and could see the piece of cloth growing slowly but surely as she worked. I arose presently and went to work for I had no time to dream of what happened years ago. I opened trunks whose broken hinges creaked in the stillness; I found school-books, letters, and a thousand and one treasures that all old, well-stored attics contain, but no money or other valuables in the line of papers of any kind to reward me for my labor.

What had I better do? Finally I decided, as usual, to wait—wait until Tom came in August, or if Mr. Elliott came home before that, I would try to get him to help me open that little drawer in the desk.

“So, Mr. James North,” I concluded aloud, fully assured, after my search in the attic that the drawer was the centre of attraction, “you may look into the kitchen windows all you like; the treasure is not there but in the living room.”

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS July and—according to Ebenezer's farm calendar—"the month to git the hayin' done and to fight potater-bugs!"

Spring was gone and summer was here. Horses and men were busy in the hayfield. How smooth and nice the meadows looked after the hay was cut. Ebenezer told me that I would never make a farmer unless I learned to drive a horse. (Did anyone ever have so many things to learn?) So I went into the fields, rode in the empty hay cart and drove the horses from the barn to the field.

"Ye be a-drivin' extra well," he informed me one day when I drove the team through the gateway and did not collide with the gate post. I could turn the team around and not tip the wagon over provided the meadow was large enough.

Aunt Jane had been busy during the long summer days making me some dainty muslin dresses. She said she was tired of seeing me

every day and all day in a short skirt and shirt waist.

It was a warm Sunday and I dressed up in one to please her. She came to my room and helped me put it on. It was very simply made, the skirt and waist were trimmed with ruffles and the sleeves were short, coming just below the elbow. Aunt Jane gave the dress a pull here and there and I could tell by the expression of her face that she was pleased with both the dress and the one who wore it. I thought, myself, it was quite becoming.

Aunt Jane kept looking at me during lunch and sighed once or twice. I knew she was wishing our exile over; but I was not. I do not remember of ever being so contented or happy before, for I found something to do or to interest me all day and every day. Before we had finished lunch I had decided to take myself in my pretty dress to a cool, shady glen where there was a spring of pure, bubbling, sparkling water coming out from under a great rocky cliff. Here I could read while Aunt Jane had her afternoon nap.

So, after lunch, I found a book that looked interesting, went out into the garden and

picked a great, half-opened Jack rose and pinned it to the front of my dress. Aunt Jane would like that, I thought. It added just the touch of color that the dress needed. Then I went through the orchard and then across a meadow. The sun was scorching hot, so I hurried along to the little glen, lined by high cliffs. The spring and the cliffs were shaded by huge trees growing out of the crevices or fissures of the rocks, the roots reaching down and growing over the sides, then disappearing again in another fissure, like some huge claw.

I remembered that when I was there last, huckleberries were blooming nearby, while down below the spring where the water runs when the stream overflows, blackberry bushes were white with blossoms. Now the berries must be putting on their shiny, black coats. "Just the place," I thought, as I hurried along in the hot July sunshine, "to read and dream!"

"Yes," I said aloud, after I reached the cool, damp shade, "the spring is all I remembered it to be." I bent down to fill my drinking cup with the crystal water and there on a little shelving place in the cliff I saw a clean glass. I took it up and wondered who

had found the spring besides myself. I looked around to see if anyone was in sight but saw nobody. I was a little afraid. Then I felt reassured with the thought that tramps would not be particular to leave a nice clean glass or to find a safe place for it. Probably some of the farm hands had left it there. Satisfied, I looked about for a comfortable place to sit and read. The cliff looked enticingly cool and green and I determined to get up there on the highest point. After trying for a few minutes to find a place on the sheer side which I could climb without soiling my dress, I gave it up and went around on the sloping side where I found it easy climbing. As I hoped, there was a broad stone at the summit, covered with a soft, dry moss and quantities of small ferns were growing up through the moss. The fragrant ferns gathered in thick tufts all about made it a most delightful place to sit and read. I made myself comfortable, with my back against a tree. It was all so peaceful and still; even the birds were taking their midday nap. All was still but the spring; the water bubbled and sparkled and gurgled cheerfully on its way down the hillside.

Suddenly I heard a little familiar chuckle—and there, on the opposite cliff, with the usual merry look on his face sat Will Elliott. I wondered how long he had been watching me.

“How long have you been there?” I inquired.

“I came before you did, Miss Lester. This is our spring.”

“Oh, well, how did I know whose spring it was!” He was sitting on the edge of the ledge with his legs hanging over the side, and looked so much at home and so amused that I wished I had something to throw at him. He had been away and I had not seen him since Cousin Tom left.

“I thought you were in the city. Your mother said she did not expect you home this week.”

“I arrived home last night,” he admitted.

“Oh, did you?” Then I asked, “What made you think of this spring?”

“Why, I was dry. We often come here in summer to get a cool drink. Then I climbed up here to think out something I was trying to decide.”

“Had you decided when I intruded upon your solitude?”

"No, and I do wish you would help me."

"Me! Help you?" I questioned in astonishment.

"Yes, you. Why not?"

"I will if I can, but it will be impossible to decide anything with you over there. Come over to my cliff. There is more room and it is much nicer than yours, too."

"Are you sure? This is a fine, old cliff."

"Do come. This has a nice green carpet and another tree for you to lean against."

"I am coming. I wanted to come—but I do so like to be persuaded—in order to be sure of a welcome."

"You are welcome, most welcome. This is a long, lonesome Sunday afternoon."

He scrambled down his cliff, then up beside me. I was curious to know what was on his mind, what he wanted to tell me and why he thought my advice was of enough importance to be consulted. But, now that he was over on my cliff, he did not seem in any haste to tell.

"Say, this is great, isn't it?" and he settled himself with his back against a tree, in lazy contentment.

"Yes, it is comfortable. That is why I

came. I wanted to be comfortable."

"Have I interfered in any way with your enjoyment of the place or the day?"

"You most certainly will, if you do not tell me what you are undecided about."

"It is too warm to be hurried, but I suppose I might as well get it over. Do you remember the night your cousin Tom came, we had a long talk after you went into the house?"

"Yes."

"He said his father was getting old, and they had decided to take another man into the business, and Tom offered me that position. Said he would insure me more money to begin with than I am getting now. I was to think it over and let him know."

"Why do you hesitate? I do not understand. Tell me."

"Well, there are several reasons. First, I shall have to leave home, and I do not think my mother will want that. But what bothers me the most is why Tom chose me when he must know so many other fellows."

"Don't you know?"

"No, honestly, I do not. Friendship is one thing and business is another."

"Well, he said he wanted you—didn't he?"

—so he must have a reason.” I could not help smiling at his evident lack of conceit.

“What are you smiling at?”

“Have you no faith in Tom’s judgment? Don’t you suppose he knows what sort of a man he wants in his business?”

“Why, yes. Tom always knows just what he wants. That is just what makes it so hard for me to understand.”

“Oh, you goose!” I could not help laughing.

At last a light seemed to dawn on him and he grew red to the roots of his soft, curly hair.

“What Cousin Tom is looking for, I guess, is an honest man with ability.”

“Thank you both. Now let’s talk of something else.”

“No, I’m not ready to change the subject. I want to talk a lot more about it.”

He was plainly embarrassed, so I inquired, “How long before you have to decide and let him know?”

“Not before fall, or possibly New Year’s.”

“Oh, well! That is a long time, so—is there any other obstacle you wanted to consult me about?”

He hesitated, then he said, "N-o. But there is something I wanted to tell you."

"What is it?" I asked eagerly; it occurred to me that he was going to tell me about James, for he must know that I was curious.

"I wanted to say that there is nothing that I would not do for your cousin Tom. He was more than good to me in the old days when we were in college. He had plenty of money and I did not, but that never made any difference to him; and his influence helped me over many otherwise impossible places. I wanted you to know how much I respect and admire your cousin."

"Yes," I laughed. "Tom loves his friends and hates his enemies."

"And the most astonishing surprise of all was that you are the cousin I often heard him mention."

He was looking through an opening in the underbrush at the little spring, and somehow I knew he thought that there was something more than cousinly feeling between Tom and me. Tom might have said something years ago that made him think so, for with his loyalty to his friends he was apt to be over-zealous. I wanted to tell him that

it was not so, but I could not make myself continue the subject. "After all," I thought, "He will find out when Eleanor comes. So it will be all right. Anyway, what difference does it make whether he knows or not?"

"It is queer," he mused, "that our neighbors should have belonged to the same family of Lesters that Tom did and I never happened to find it out; and it is equally queer that Tom's 'little cousin' as he used to speak of you should come here and be my neighbor."

"Yes, it is queer. The world must be getting rather small."

"No, not small, but just the right size."

I knew he was about to say something nice by the mischievous sparkle of his eyes:

"You fitted into our neighborhood just as a new star comes into the heavens, bright, sparkling and cheery, shedding a lustrous light both on the just and the unjust."

I stood up and made him a deep, low curtsey, and said, "Thank you. I have had nice speeches made to me before today."

"I am sure you have, and they were meant—every word. No one could help it, you know."

"Blarney, my friend, comes off a lawyer's

tongue as easily as water from a duck's back. I am afraid you are not an exception to that rule. You know that Tom looks through colored glasses when he recommends his friends. Did you know that he was coming home to stay the month of August?"

"No, I did not know; but I thought he might."

"Yes, he is coming, and I have invited a friend, Eleanor Roberts, to stay the month of August, also. I am quite sure you will like her."

"Why should I like her?"

"Because I want you to be good and help me entertain them."

"Tom would not thank me for doing that."

"Yes, he will. Now, be good and promise."

"What is my reward if I promise?" He was looking at the rose on the front of my dress where the ruffles formed a point.

"Will you promise if I give you this rose?"

"I will help all I can, if Tom wants me to."

"No, oh no! You do not want the rose. I am sorry I mentioned it." I tore the rose loose from the dress.

"Yes, I do. Please give it to me. I will do all I can—all that Tom would approve of."

You know there isn't anything that I would not do for him."

"I did not ask you to help him. He can attend to his own affairs. I asked you to help me. But I understand. I will take myself and my rose home," and I walked to the edge of the cliff and looked over. Some moss and soil gave way and went rattling down to the ground below.

"Come away, please!" he implored. "Don't you realize you might fall?"

I laughed tantalizingly and held the rose in the air over the edge of the cliff.

"Give it to me," he whispered, ever so softly. "I promise to help you now and always. Now may I have the rose? Please give it to me."

I realized that he was trying to be loyal to his friend. Sweet as the last hour had been, I thought it time the rose was removed from a place of instant jeopardy and dropped it over the cliff. I drew back the empty hand and we both looked over the edge, but the rose was gone out of sight, safe somewhere amongst the leaves below.

For several seconds he stared looking over the cliff. His jaw was set, but his eyes were

dangerously appealing. He was strangely moved.

"See here, Miss Lester, I wanted that rose."

"Oh, did you! Never mind, it is gone. Now we will go home." I walked over to the other side and began to let myself down over the edge.

"Wait, let me help you."

He took my hand to keep me from falling. He did not release it but held it tightly until I looked up. "If you will allow me, I promise to do all I possibly can. May we not combine forces and do all that is possible to entertain your friends?"

"If you are sure I am not asking too much."

"I am sure."

He scrambled down behind me; then we walked to the little spring.

"I want one more drink; will you give it to me?" I asked.

He took the glass, bent down and let the water flow into and over it for a few seconds while I seated myself on a moss-cushioned rock nearby. While I was drinking, he walked over to the place where I dropped the rose and began to look amongst the shrubs and leaves.

"Ah!" I heard him say.

He had found the rose; it was his at last. He fastened it to the lapel of his coat. There was a satisfied smile on his face.

I held out my hand. "Give me back the rose. It is mine, and I want it—please do."

"I am sorry but I cannot give it to you."

"Yes, please do, I want it."

"No," shaking his head, "I cannot, really. I will never give it to anyone but your cousin, Tom Lester. If he wants it he can have it. No one else will ever have it, not even you."

Something about him reminded me of a naughty small boy. I was about to laugh, then thought I had better not. I decided to drop the matter of the rose where it was and turned my attention to the beautiful country.

"Do you know," he said, "that you look like a nymph of the fountain in that white dress?"

"No, really, I cannot imagine myself a nymph."

"Be a nymph just now, and give me the glass; I am fearfully dry." As he refreshed himself, I was looking down the ravine in an abstracted way. The sun was behind a cloud, the glen was filled with a soft mellow

light that blurred the trees and other objects in the distance.

"Do you know," I meditated aloud, "that books and pictures cannot teach us everything; the reality of all this we have to learn from actual contact and observation."

Mr. Elliott nodded assent. "That's true. It is a good view. It is interesting. Look along the valley in the distance; everything is softened to mystery and elusiveness by the shifting shadows of that passing summer cloud. That view is one a painter would covet and an author grow discouraged because he could not describe it. Everything seems asleep in this little glen except you and me."

"Yes, everything does seem asleep, it is so still!"

Then we strolled leisurely along towards the house. I remembered the old desk and the little drawer that no one could open.

"Oh, there is something I should like to ask you to do for me when you have time."

"What is it? I have all the time there is now."

"Do you remember Great-uncle's desk in the living room?"

"Yes, what about it?"

"There is a drawer in that old desk that is locked, or something. Anyway, we cannot get it open and my bump of curiosity will not allow me to rest until I know what is inside. I want to investigate. Do you think you could get it open?"

"I can try," he answered smiling. He seemed glad to help me.

We hurried along to the house. Aunt Jane was interested when I explained to her what we were going to do. We did not wish to do anything that would damage the desk, but after a long time he succeeded in getting it open, and in the drawer we found a little old-fashioned case with something else done up in a little package, the paper covering of which was yellow and worn with age. We opened the package and found nothing but a dry stem or two and dust which evidently had once been flowers.

Aunt Jane opened the little case and found an ambrotype. She almost dropped it in her surprise, after she had gazed at the picture an instant.

"Ruth!" she exclaimed, "It is almost a perfect picture of you."



“‘Ruth,’ she exclaimed, ‘it is almost a perfect picture of you’”

"Oh, let me see!" Mr. Elliott and I both looked over Aunt Jane's shoulder.

"Yes," said Mr. Elliott. "It surely does look like Miss Lester; the hair and dress are different in some way, but the features are almost the same."

I was trying to remember what I had heard about my grandmother and great-uncle. Vaguely my mind began to form the resemblance of a chain of events that happened long ago. Suddenly the truth flashed upon me.

"Why, yes! Don't you remember, Aunt Jane, of hearing something about Grandfather and Great-uncle both wanting to marry Grandmother?" I was growing more excited every instant.

"Ye-es," Aunt Jane answered, "now you mention it, I think I do." She was still gazing at the picture.

"That is surely it. Great-uncle has always kept her picture. I have found Treasure Number One!" I went on excitedly. "Who knows what may be hidden here in the old house, waiting for someone to discover it. I wonder who will be lucky enough to solve the mystery! It may be you, Aunt Jane,

and it may be me, or it may be James, and then again, it may never be found."

When I said "James," Mr. Elliott grew red to the very roots of his hair, and never looked up from the picture he was holding to the light.

"He knows something about James and is ashamed," I thought. "I do hate mysteries and I will make him tell me, if I can, why James is staying here. But I must be careful for I do not wish to hurt his feelings or let Aunt Jane know anything about the mysterious James."

"Now, Ruth," said Aunt Jane, "I wish you would not talk in that absurd fashion—you give me the creeps! I shall be afraid to stay in the house nights. You make me imagine all kinds of things—ghosts, burglars and—"

"All right, Aunt," I said carelessly. "I will not mention treasures again to you. I will hunt in solitude and you can do the same. Can I have Grandmother's picture?"

"Yes, keep the picture; you are welcome to it."

I sat there by the desk, idly dreaming. I happened to turn the little drawer over and noticed something written on the under side.

I looked closely and made out these words:
"Seek and ye shall find."

"Goodness!" I exclaimed, and my eyes seemed bulging out of my head. I held the little drawer up so they could both see and read.

"Strange. What do you make of it?" Aunt Jane asked Mr. Elliott.

"*"Seek and ye shall find,"*" he repeated slowly. "It may mean something and it may not. Someone may have written it for fun; I do not know." He was studying the writing closely.

"Is it Great-uncle's writing?" I asked.

"Yes, I think it is, and I will tell you there is something strange about your uncle's affairs. It has bothered me," he continued. "But all may be made clear in time, for I have a letter in my possession with instructions to open it one year after your uncle's death. I have every reason to believe that he had some money—how much I do not know. His papers are safe somewhere; they must be. Still, I do not know why he did not leave them with me. Father seems to think all will be explained when the letter is opened."

"When will the year expire?" I asked.

"In October, I believe it is."

"Almost three more months of suspense. Well, I have an idea we can bear it."

"Yes," said Aunt Jane, "we can bear it. Now I will go and prepare tea," and she hastened to the kitchen.

I pulled a rocker forward. "Will you come and sit down, Mr. Elliott? I want to talk with you."

He did as I requested.

"Now, tell me about James. Who is he, and what is he doing?"

"Why, working for you, isn't he?"

"Now, don't evade the question. I want to know his real business. We both know he is not a farmer any more than I am."

"I thought you considered yourself a farmer?"

"I am not, but I should like to be."

"Possibly that is what he would like to be."

"Young man, are you going to tell me?"

"Haven't I—?"

"No, and you know it. Is it because you are ashamed to?"

"Yes, partly."

"Why not tell me?"

"Because I promised not to tell anyone."

"A bad promise is better broken than kept," I retorted.

"You will know some time. I cannot tell you now."

I was in high dudgeon at such ignominious defeat. It was very annoying to have him act so. Why couldn't he tell me? "Oh, well, who cares? I will not bother my head over him any more. He can keep it to himself if he wants to—" so I told myself.

After a few minutes I said to him:

"My dear Mr. Elliott, I'm afraid you'll never be appreciated in this world. You—"

"I think I am a very tactful person," he interrupted, "because you and I never quarrel. We have been good friends ever since the day you arrived in town. I do not know any other question that I would not answer gladly. I would answer your question now if it concerned me alone."

"Never mind. I do not wish to know. Let us talk about farming."

There was real concern in the look he gave me. His face was very expressive, responding readily to every change of mood. He knew I was angry and he felt uncomfortable. But

somehow I felt as though I were being made a fool of and it made me angry.

We changed the subject, but there were frequent pauses. The spontaneity was gone. Finally he arose, remarking that it was time to go home. As he came to bid me good evening, he hesitated and then said:—

“I know I am obstinate, but won’t you overlook it this time? I will be exceedingly grateful if you will. Please be good to me!” and he held out his hand with a winning smile.

“I will think about it, and let you know some other time.” In my heart I did forgive him, I could not help it for I knew he was right from his standpoint. He must have seen what I was too stubborn to acknowledge, for, with a genial and happy smile he replied:

“Thank you. Now, good-night. I have had a charming afternoon,” and was off down the garden path.

I put Grandmother’s picture back in the desk. I thought she would be lonesome anywhere else. “Good-night, Grandmother,” I said softly, “some time you will make it known to me where the treasures are hidden.”

CHAPTER X

AUGUST HAD come and with it my friend Eleanor Roberts. She was what Mr. Palmer called a "dreadful comfortable person" to have in one's home. She was so bright and attractive and winning that I was afraid even Ebenezer would transfer his affections from me to her. She was of medium height, very daintily and beautifully made, and besides, was what some people call 'stylish' from the crown of her hat to the sole of her well-shaped shoe. But her face—well, my cousin Tom thought it the most beautiful he had ever seen.

She fell in love with the farm at once and declared that her visit would be one long, sweet dream of peace—that she intended to enjoy every minute of it.

One evening when Mr. Elliott came with the mail I introduced them, and each seemed to decide then and there that they would be friends.

I told her about the farm and she thought our coming and everything that had happened quite interesting.

Meanwhile, I was adding to my knowledge about farming, constantly. I was just drinking in impressions every time I went to the garden or wandered across the fields. As to James, he still continued to be a subject of speculation, although I had neglected to watch him since Eleanor's arrival. I decided not to tell her about him or about the hidden treasure. I meant to unravel these difficulties myself and my active interest was aroused again by seeing James gazing into the kitchen window one evening where Aunt Jane was mixing bread. She was unconscious of his presence, so no harm was done, but I marched upstairs, took the silver trimmed revolver out of the trunk and put it where I could get it at an instant's notice. Not that I had any idea of using it, but I felt safer, somehow, in having it where I could look at it.

One warm afternoon Eleanor and I had made ourselves comfortable on the veranda. We seemed to have the world all to ourselves—everything was so still—Eleanor in the big swing chair and I in the hammock. We had

intended to read if the opportunity presented itself.

I looked up and saw Ebenezer Palmer coming up through the garden. So busy had I been with Eleanor that I had not seen him for several days.

"Here comes my neighbor and teacher in farming, Eleanor, and I want you to know him," I said as he approached the steps.

"Glad to meet ye!" he responded, acknowledging the introduction and at the same time shaking her hand cordially. "I knowed someone mus' be over here 'cause Miss Ruth, here, ain't been over. Wife's fussed considerable 'cause ye didn't cum."

"Are ye from the city?" he asked her.

He wanted to know all about Eleanor, and when he was in pursuit of information he would ask almost any question.

"Like the country?" he continued.

"Very much in summer."

"Ever travelled much on the cars?" his questions so far had not given him sufficient light on the subject.

"I suppose I have when I come to think about it." She was beginning to get interested and wondered what question he

would ask next, but it seemed he had decided to give a little of his own history before he proceeded any further.

“Wa'al, me an' Wife went to Newport once. My wife's sister, Phoebe Ann, she's a house-keeper fur one on them millionaire big bugs. Ye see, Phoebe Ann, she an' her husband stay to home an' keep things a-goin' so Mr. Big Bug can cum an' go just as he pleases.”

Eleanor wanted to hear him talk, so she asked:

“Did you like the millionaire's place at Newport?”

“Yes, 'twas grand an' beautiful.” Ebenezer was gazing down into the valley and had a far-away look as though he could see it now.

“They had what I'd call a big yard all fixed up grand like. They called it a 'park'. It had roads an' paths an' lots uv trees an' flowers an' a greenhouse—in fact, all kinds of contraptions. Phoebe Ann, she cums up once in a while an' visits us and tells all about the improvements. By the Powers! Mr. Millionaire is a pretty shrewd one if he be rich. She says he buys 'most everything by hull-sale—groceries an' everything. I didn't think rich folks bothered themselves

with such things, but I vow, he does," he continued volubly. "She says it do take a powerful lot to go 'round. Say," (looking at Eleanor) "how much do you s'pose of mulases it do take to make a rule of mulases cookies?"

"A quart?" ventured Eleanor.

"No, a hull gallon; and they make that batch of cookies twice a week—just think on't!"

We did try to think "on't," but did not dare look at each other.

"An' ham," he went on not looking at us, "they bile a hull one to once, eat off it once or twice an' the rest is gi'n to the dogs!"

"Very wasteful," Eleanor assented behind her book.

"Yes, extravagant," I murmured.

"Wa'al, them's millionaires' ways, I s'pose—perhaps his women folks be to blame."

"They almost always are," replied Eleanor, still behind her book. There was silence for a few minutes. Then he began a new subject.

"Say, don't ye think Miss Ruth here is gittin' to be quite a farmer?"

"I suppose she is." Eleanor wanted to hear his views on the question.

"Dearie me!" he laughed. "I do wish ye could've heared her ask questions when she furst cum. She didn't know nuthin' about the country. I tol' Wife Miss Ruth was like the ole russet apple-tree that grows down by the pasture barway—they be the best thar be when they ripen up."

"Then you think I have really improved?" I was anxious to know for I had tried so hard to learn.

"Sure on't; but ye tried to draw the hull load to once, the same as ole Mrs. Balson did. All kinds of farmin' ain't to be learnt in a day. It takes the powerfulest lot of hard work an' patience—yes, an' trust in Providence, to make a good farmer."

"What about old Mrs. Balson?" I asked.

"Who was old Mrs. Balson?" inquired Eleanor.

"Oh, an ole woman that used to live down beyond here on the cross road. She had a daughter named Matildy, a high-spirited gal, who was great fer book learnin'. She loved to fix up pretty, too."

"Will you please tell us about the old lady—is it a story? We want to hear about her."

“Ye do? Wa’al, ’tain’t much of a story, but I’ll tell ye what thar be on’t. It seems the man what lives on the Joe Yorkin farm give ole Mrs. Balson sum winter apples, providin’ she’d pick ’em up. So she borrowed Jake Turner’s ole sorrel hoss an’ she an’ ole Polly Mannin’ started to git the apples. She got along all right an’ filled the wagin heapin’ full—they believed in gittin’ a-plenty while they was about it. Wa’al, as I said, they got the wagin heapin’ full an’ started fer home. They got along all right till they cum to a steep hill just below the Joe Mannin’ place. ’Tis a steep one, now, I can tell ye; ’most as steep as the roof of a house. Here she stopped an’ looked at the leetle ole hoss, then at the hill.

“‘Laws, Polly,’ she drawled out, ‘this leetle hoss can’t never hold this heavy wagin in the world! Guess we’d better git out an’ do it ourselves.’ So they took the leetle ole hoss out of the thills. Then old Mrs. Balson got between the thills herself an’ Polly she pushed or pulled back from behind the wagin. Wa’al, they started, an’ as the wagin gained speed accordin’ to the steepness o’ the hill the ole ladies began to light out

an' take longer steps until they fairly flew—ole Polly kickin' up the dust behind. They both held their gait pretty well till they cum to the steepest pitch on the hill, then 'twarn't no use. Ole Mrs. Balson stubbed her toe, an' down she fell. Polly went down when she stubbed agin ole Mrs. Balson, an' the wagin went right on an' fetched up agin the stun-wall an' stove the hull contraption all to pieces. It just rained apples in them parts fer some time."

"Was she hurt?" I inquired.

"Hurt? No. She fell under the wagin, an' arter a while she crawled out from under Polly an' looked arund in a dazed sort o' way an' drawled out, 'Law, Polly, I didn't think the ol' thing would act like that.' An' that daughter o' hers, Matildy, was up top o' the hill an' see the hull performance an' 'most died a-laughin' when she tol' me on't. Said she'd a mother that was game every time. Wa'al, here I be a-runnin' on an' I ain't no idee when to stop arter I git started on them ole stories. Now I be a-goin'. Say, cum over an' bring yer comp'ny; Wife'd be powerful glad to see her."

CHAPTER XI

AUGUST, ACCORDING to Ebenezer, "is the month to rest up arter hayin' an' to go around the country an' see what yer neighbors be a-doin'."

Eleanor and I had "gadded around" but we did not know much about what our neighbors "was a-doin'." Cousin Tom had come and Will Elliott had planned to be at home as much as he could during the month of August.

Tom and Eleanor seemed to have so much to talk about that they gravitated towards each other in a most shameless manner. I should have been neglected if Will Elliott had not come over quite often and talked to me, and I often wondered what he thought about Tom and Eleanor, for even Ebenezer wanted to know "how long they had been keepin' comp'ny."

One day Cousin Tom and Eleanor went off for a walk, leaving me alone. It was very

still on the veranda and I lay in the hammock trying not to feel lonesome and watching a swallow as it circled up and up in the hazy atmosphere, then down, down, until near the treetops, when it would spread its wings again and sail away out of sight. The breeze gently stirred the wistaria vine to and fro and swayed the "last rose of summer" on my late blooming Jack Rose bush in a most bewitching way before my admiring eyes. A saucy wren sat on a fence post across the road, twittering constantly. He seemed never to tire of singing to keep up the spirits of his family. He was a wee, small bird to make so much noise from early morning until the late twilight of our long summer days. He sang the same tune over and over.

I lay there gazing across to the fields where Tom and Will Elliott had laid out a golf course but a day or two previously, when I heard footsteps and recognized at once who was coming.

"Ah, there comes Ebenezer. Now I shall have someone to talk to me. I wish the saucy wren would stop." I was particularly pleased to see the old gentleman for I had not seen him for several days.

"Wa'al, takin' yer comfort, be ye?"

"Yes, that is what I am trying to do."

"I've cum over to ask what them wooden crosses be with numbers on 'em an' what the flags is fur, that the boys have stuck up round in the meadows an' pastures."

"That is a game called golf."

"A game? Wa'al, I swan! When I was a young man, I didn't git no time to play games. A game! How times do change."

"Would you like to learn to play?"

"Me learn? No—not much! I ain't got no fancy stockin's an' short trousers the same's the boys be rigged out in."

"They are not necessary," I said, laughing at the funny expression on his dear, old face.

"Wa'al, 'tain't no use to urge me. If I can't play rigged out the same's the boys be, I shan't try. Whew, if this ain't a scorchin' day! This verandy is the coolest place I've struck today. If thar's a breeze anywhar ye do git it here. I think we'll be gittin' thunder an' lightin' afore long. Don't ye hear that cuckoo over in the woods?"

"Yes, I have been listening to it for some time."

"Wa'al, when ye hear one on them birds

it gener'ly indercates a powerful hot spell followed by thunder an' lightin'. Now, ye just see if I ain't right. Now, I must be a-goin' 'cause I've got to finish hoein' that north field of corn, but I was mad afore I cum over. I'd been out to that cornfield."

"Why, what made you mad? You do not look angry. What was the matter with the cornfield?"

"Wa'al, thar was matter enough to make anyone mad. How long is that cousin of yourn to stay around this neighborhood? He an' William do act just like two boys possessed. An' they be both on 'em ole enough to behave, if they're ever goin' to."

"What did they do to your cornfield?" I asked.

"Wa'al, ye see, while I was gone to the village this mornin' tradin', them two villainous young men—that be ole enough to let other folks's belongin's alone—got James to help 'em try that new hoss I traded fer the other day. William said it was balky when I first brought it home. So they thought they'd be smart an' cultivate out that field of corn, an' now I wish you could see the condition of it. The hoss is a great, big-

footed critter an' it stomped my corn all up. Never did see such a lookin' mess in all my born days. Guess they had more'n one fracas with it, 'cause the corn is stomped up in places, all over the hull field. Blame a balky hoss anyway!"

"Did you say anything to William about it?"

"No, I ain't seen him. I thought I'd find him over here. 'Twouldn't do no good if I had. He'd just laugh an' like-enuff do it ag'in.

"Talkin' of balky hosses makes me think of ole Jed Brownson. Ever heard tell of him?"

"No, I think not. If it is a story, please tell it to me."

"Wa'al," he began, after settling himself comfortably against the veranda post, "they do say that Jed was the greatest hoss-trader that ever was. Smart was no name fer it. He was just over-did with smartness. Father said that when Jed took to hoss-tradin' the world lost a good minister. Why, he could beat any minister I ever heard talk in meetin'. He was the most all-round gifted man I ever knowed. He an' the new ministers would

get to be great friends until they knowed him better. Wa'al, I heard father tell once thar was a revivalist here a-holdin' meetin's. An' one day Jed offered to give the minister a ride home. It was quite a long ways where the minister was a-stayin', so he gladly accepted. They rode quietly along talkin' Scripture—couldn't no parson talk Jed down—when the hoss took a notion to balk up. Then it stood an' wouldn't budge an inch. Jed tried all the quiet, gentle things he could think on but 'twant no use—the hoss just humped his back an' wouldn't stir a foot. Fin'ly Jed lost his temper an' began to swear an' lash the critter—an' they do say that he was just as gifted at swearin' as he was at talkin' Scripture when he once got a-goin' an' a little more so when he was good an' warmed up an' right down to business. The minister stood an' looked on dumfounded. Fin'ly he says, 'Brother, haven't ye fergotten yer-self?' 'No, sir-ree!' shouted Jed; 'when I talk religion I talk religion, but when I drive hoss I lay my religion one side!' an' he went on a-swearin' an' larrupin' the critter ag'in.

"Thar, I be a-goin'. Whar be yer comp'ny? Ha, yonder cums William. I guess he be

a-goin' to invite ye all to a picnic, 'cause he said he might want the hosses tomorrow." So saying he went off by way of the road as William came up the garden path.

Ebenezer was right, as usual. Will Elliott said he had come over to inquire if we would like a day's outing to a glen in the woods he had discovered on one of his fishing excursions after trout. I told him I thought it would be delightful, that we would talk it over with the others in the evening, and asked him if we could take our lunch and make a day of it. He said that was just what he wanted to do, and that it was a cool, dark ravine and the very place to go on a hot summer day. I went into the house and consulted Aunt Jane about the lunch. The more I thought about it the more excited I grew.

As Eleanor and Tom did not appear, Will Elliott suggested that we play a game of golf and possibly we might overtake them.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEXT day was warm but pleasant. Ebenezer Palmer and his wife, Aunt Jane, Will Elliott and I started for the woods in the three seated buckboard; Cousin Tom and Eleanor in Will Elliott's buggy. Aunt Jane and Mrs. Palmer were in the back seat of our buckboard. Ebenezer was jammed in with the lunch on the middle seat, much to his annoyance. He said he didn't like to trust his old bones to anyone's driving, even William's, but for once William was having his own way with the old man. Will Elliott helped me to the front seat so I could take lessons in driving, he said.

"Fur heaven's sakes, don't let her drive! I can't trust this load to no greenhorn's drivin'." Ebenezer was like many other old and experienced horsemen—he liked to have the reins in his own hands.

At last everything was ready and we drove gaily away down the dusty road. Cousin

Tom and Eleanor were driving slowly along in front of us, and I imagined as I watched them from my comfortable seat in the buckboard that I could see saucy little Cupid sitting on the back of the buggy seat, tickling Cousin Tom's ear with the feather end of his troublesome arrow, and making him think and consider by whispering, "How would you like to have such a pleasant companion to go with you all the remaining journey of your life?" Little they knew or saw of the beautiful wild flowers growing along the highway that filled my heart with gladness and little they knew of the locust crying "Hot! Hot!" in the bunch of alders by the roadside. They were together, and that was joy enough.

I was brought out of my pleasant dream by Ebenezer calling out, "Seems to me ye ain't very sociable over on the front seat." If he could not drive he wanted to talk. Aunt Jane and Mrs. Palmer's conversation did not seem to interest him sufficiently.

I laughed and looked up, meeting Mr. Elliott's questioning eyes.

"I was looking at the beautiful flowers growing along the roadside. That August

goldenrod waves to us from every fence corner along the road."

"It is of no use," Will Elliott responded with just a little sadness and dejection in his voice and manner, "Miss Lester will not talk to us if there is a weed in sight."

"Very well, I will overlook the weeds if you will let me drive."

It was a long, level stretch of road. He deliberately passed the lines over to me.

"Now, hold them so. I see that father has not been thorough when he has given you lessons in driving." Our hands were considerably mixed up before the lesson was finished.

"May the Suffering Powers protect our ole bones!" growled Ebenezer, when he found out that I was driving. "An', William, remember that off hoss will jump at almost nothin'. It's a dreadful skittish critter."

Mr. Elliott went on with his instructions and did not seem to hear the old man. It was up hill over half of the way. The poor horses must have been tired of climbing first one hill and then another. After one long pull we turned in at a gateway and drove across a rough pasture. Huckleberries were

growing in great abundance on each side of the cart path. Each little bush was bending with the weight of so many berries. We stopped to pick some and Ebenezer climbed around to the front seat and took the loose reins with a look of relief and pleasure and proceeded to drive the horses down each steep hill until they came to a house in the valley.

Will Elliott and I walked slowly down the cart path behind them, and I stopped to look at a great clump of barberry bushes, the clusters of berries looking so beautiful shading from a pale pink to a deep, rich red. Each little cluster seemed to radiate color in the bright, August sunshine.

"Please, Miss Lester, remember this is a holiday. It is wrong to study on a holiday. We are going to the woods and everyone should be gay, but how can I be if you refuse to talk to me? You may consider me a weed if you will be so unkind. In fact, I will be any kind of a weed if you will talk to me and think of me as you do of them."

"Very well, I will try." I laughed at his plaintive and pleading voice. "I don't think I will consider you a wild weed, but a nice,

old-fashioned friend that grows in your mother's garden," (and here I looked at him an instant to see if I dared say it) "it is called—it is called—'Sweet William'!" As I said that I started off after the buckboard which was a little ahead of us.

"Here, here! Wait! I have taken my hat off and I want you to see how I look when I am embarrassed. Please won't you shake hands?"

I gave him my hands for an instant, then darted away after a butterfly basking on a bunch of indigo.

A minute or two later we had overtaken the others. They were getting out of the buckboard. Tom and Eleanor who had stopped to pick berries also were waiting for us. The horses were left in the good man's barn. We took the lunch and other paraphernalia and made our way across a small meadow, then through the thick bushes along the bank of a brook until we came to the entrance to a ravine. We made our way along the brook, through the miniature canyon until we came upon a wider space where the brook widened out into a small pond. Here we decided to eat our lunch, so we left

our belongings and as it was still early, went on to explore the ravine.

Everywhere—on the rocks in the path, along the brookside and up the slopes and ledges—was a fine, soft, green moss and out of this thousands of small ferns were growing. We were in the midst of what Thoreau called “the cheerful community of the polypody fern.” How welcome to the feet was this soft carpet, and how restful to the eye!

Great boulders presented an almost insurmountable barrier and sometimes we were obliged to cross to the other side of the brook on stepping stones. Tall hemlocks were growing from the water’s edge up the side of the ravine. They grew very high, veritably stretching their arms to reach the sunlight above. Underbrush was scarce, there being only an occasional small hemlock which had successfully overcome all obstacles.

“How the water must rush down through here after a hard rain,” Tom remarked, “and one would imagine its noise as it came thundering down through this rocky cut, dashing against the great boulders that had withstood even the water’s fury and refused to move.”

Ebenezer helped his wife along over the slippery places. Mr. Elliott divided his attention and assistance between Aunt Jane and me, while Tom gave his undivided attention to Eleanor, preceding the rest of the party.

"Some do 'stan' on slippery places'," quoted Ebenezer as he extended his hand to his wife to help her across, when the moss on the stone gave way, his arms flew up and waved wildly in the air, and off he slipped into the water. He would have fallen full length backwards if his step-son had not come to his rescue and braced him firmly from behind.

"I say, old man," laughed the disrespectful son, "'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall'."

But the old man was not to be outdone. He returned, "Don't ye be so smart, William, but just remember that 'Vain is the help of man'," and while we enjoyed the fun, he busied himself re-adjusting his wearing apparel that had become decidedly disarranged during his enforced gymnastics. Soon we were on our way again, but we could hear the water, "slush, slush," every time he put his wet foot to the ground.

"Was William bothering you?" I heard

Mrs. Palmer inquire in her quiet, soothing voice.

"Hm, William thinks it necessary to jog my mem'ry altogether too often."

"Not at all," protested William, "but wouldn't it be a good idea to empty the water out of your shoe? If you will sit down, I will take the shoe off for you."

"Wa'al, that be a kinder good idee. My feet don't seem to balance somehow."

Ebenezer looked at his step-son with a twinkle in his eye. The young man returned the look and smiled, and peace was restored once more.

Tom and Eleanor had gone a little way up the brook and were gaily laughing at the unsuccessful attempts they made in trying to spear a fish with a sharpened stick.

We slowly continued our journey up the ravine until we came to a level plain covered with thick wood and underbrush.

"This is all," said our self-appointed guide, Mr. Elliott.

We wandered back slowly as we came. Here and there a bright spot of sunlight came to us through the tall tree-tops, reminding us that it was the hour for lunch. The men

soon had a good fire burning and the appetizing odor of coffee and broiled ham was wafted to us by the breeze.

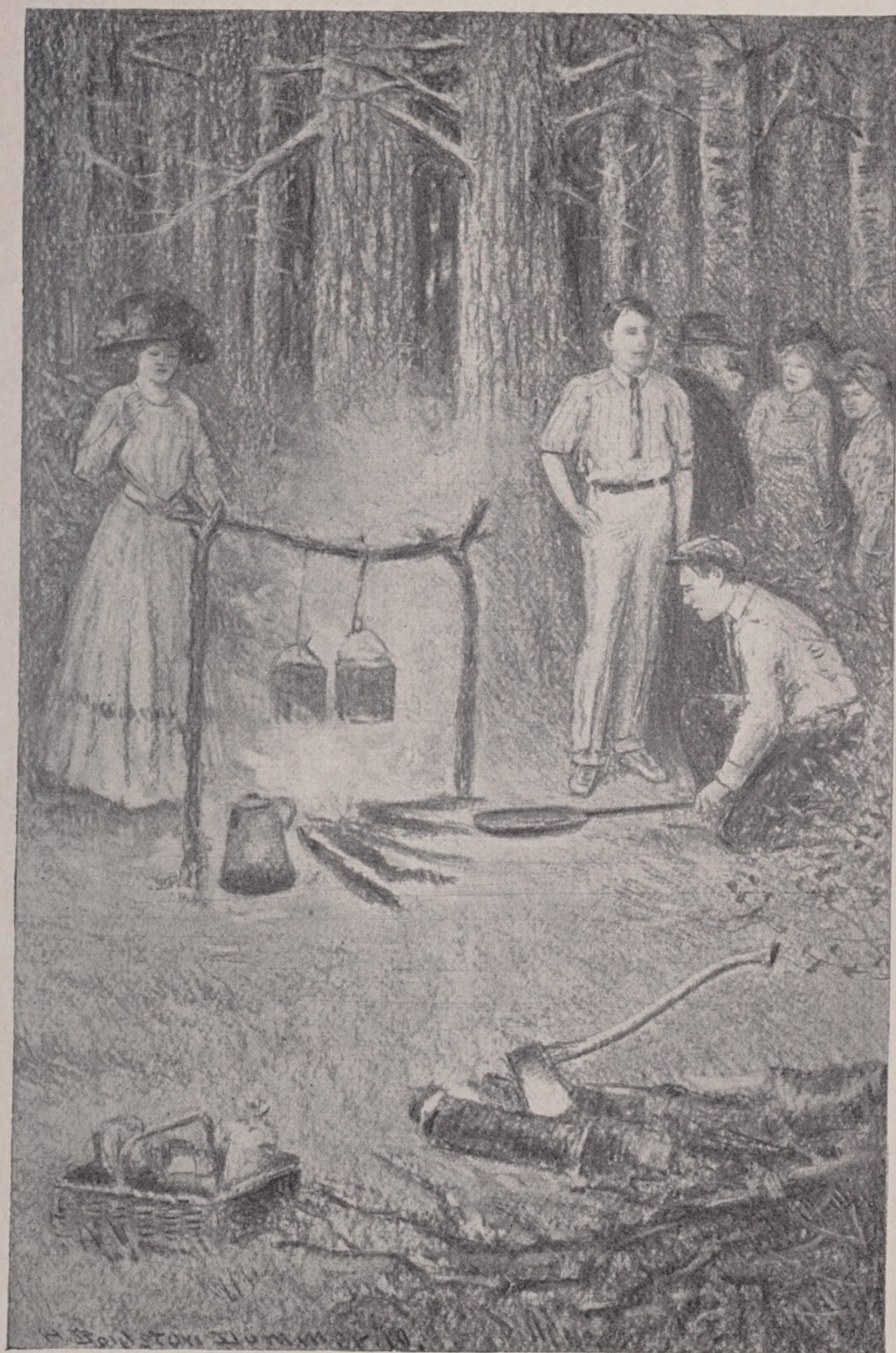
We lingered a long time over our lunch. The sun was hot over head, but the trees were thick with leaves and a faint breeze came to us from the pond.

After we packed away what remained of our lunch, Cousin Tom read aloud to us from a book Eleanor had brought, we listening in a lazy, dreamy silence.

He had been reading some time when Eleanor, either from mischief or because she was tired of the book, and did not find anything more entertaining to do, gave a large, thick bush near her a violent shake, and almost immediately there swarmed out from the opposite side of the bush a great mass of furious black bees, filling the air with their angry buzz.

"Hornets!" shouted Tom. He began fighting them with his hat, and seizing a carriage robe, threw it over Aunt Jane in the hammock. Will Elliott was just as busy; off came his coat, and he tucked it around his mother and over her head.

"Get under this blanket!" he commanded me.



"The men soon had a good fire burning"

No quicker said than done. I lost no time in getting under the thick carriage robe, leaving space enough to peep out at the others.

When Eleanor realized what she had done, she screamed and began to run, a swarm of angry bees following her. Elliott and Tom fought their way to her, using their felt hats to great advantage. I laughed heartily at their frantic endeavors, but it was no laughing matter to them. Cousin Tom picked Eleanor up in his arms, and instead of carrying her to a place of safety, he stood holding her as if he never meant to let her go, or had lost the power of locomotion.

"Run, Tom, do!" coaxed Elliott. He was rushing hither and thither, waving his hat and a dish-towel which had hastily snatched from the lunch-basket frantically trying to protect Tom and his precious burden. At that, Tom came to his senses, and began to run.

In the meantime, Ebenezer was on the field, with the enemy in full command. He had taken off his coat, and covered up his head but the bees had squirmed up his shirt sleeves and pants' legs. He was making wild and weird gestures. His dancing was

vigorous and startling. Out from under the coat, muttering that sounded to my ears rather profane flowed constant and prolonged.

"Run to the pond!" I shouted to him. He seemed to understand, and went; the others were waiting there.

Will Elliott, supposing that they were a safe distance, came back after his mother and Aunt Jane. He hurried them along with their heads still covered with the coats to the bank of the pond.

But it was no use; the bees were determined to have their revenge; they all gathered together and followed, and then on the bank of the pond, a mighty battle was fought. It was not a fair fight, for the bees outnumbered their enemies a hundred to one. I saw it all, and in my safe retreat, laughed and cried until I was a fit subject for an asylum.

Ebenezer Palmer, in a fit of desperation, jumped into the pond. Silence reigned supreme for a moment; then his head appeared above the water like a huge pond-lily.

"Pull for the shore, old man," shouted his disrespectful step-son; "or shall we 'throw out the life line'?"

"Don't ye bother about me, young man. I larned to swim afore ye was born; and mind ye keep an eye on yer mother."

Then he watched the retreat of the gallant fighters with a broad grin, and seemed in no hurry to leave the protecting safety of the pond. After a time he was persuaded to land; then they all disappeared out of my sight, going to the farm-house where the horses were and I seemed to be left deserted on the field of battle.

After a time Will Elliott came looking for me.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, not a sting."

"Then let us get away from here."

Before I followed him, I took one last, long look up the little glen, so dark and cool and musical with the running of the little brook; I did not want to go to that other world outside of this fairy grotto.

"Where are the others," I inquired.

"They have gone home. Father was so wet it was best to hurry him home. I will take you home in the buggy that Tom came in, if you do not mind."

"No, I do not mind." Then I followed

him along the fern-grown path in silence; I was glad the others were gone, and there was no need to hurry.

"If you will come around the end of the pond, I will show you the most beautiful picture I ever looked at."

I happened to look at him, and saw a mischievous twinkle in his easily ignited eyes; then I forgot all about him. I was walking along the edge of the pond, and happened to look into the water. "Ah!" I exclaimed; then bending over so I could get a better view, I saw reflected in nature's mirror, drooping grasses, and small shrubs almost covered with climbing hempweed in bloom. The vines were climbing and twining over everything that would support them; the pink and white blossoms were suspended in mid-air over the smooth surface of the water, and their feathery loveliness was reflected from the deep, dark depth below.

"Is that the picture you referred to?"

"No, mine is more beautiful than that. Ah! here it is. Now bend over and take a good look straight down into the water."

I did as he told me, and saw myself reflected in the clear water—nothing else—from this

steep bank, except part of his face over my shoulder and the sky.

I was disgusted at my own stupidity, but he seemed so delighted that I finally laughed with him.

"Ah! that's right, smile; it makes the picture more beautiful."

Just then some soil and small stones gave way, and fell into the water and rippled its smooth surface. Lightly our faces swayed to and fro, as the little ripples chased each other across the shimmering smoothness of the little pond.

"Isn't that a most exquisite picture?" he asked, his eyes still on the reflected faces.

It was a nice picture; he was just impressing upon me what he considered a fact.

"Oh, come along! I have had enough of your blarney; I had rather look at landscapes; there is more to them; portraits are not in my line. Come! It is time to go home."

I walked along, and he was obliged to follow me with the remark that I wasn't very polite; he always admired my landscapes; why couldn't I admire his favorite portraits?

When we were in sight of our own home, showing faint and dim in the twilight, he wanted to know if my day in the woods had been all I had anticipated it to be.

I said that it had, and more.

CHAPTER XV

"AUNT JANE, may I invite Ebenezer Palmer's family over to tea this afternoon? It is Tom's birthday and I think we ought to celebrate some way."

"Why, yes," she replied, "if you want them. I think it a good idea myself."

I knew she would have something good. I offered to help but she said that she and Susan would do all that was necessary. I was soon on my way to Ebenezer Palmer's, and had gone about half way when I saw the old man coming, so I waited for him.

"Hi thar!" he called; "is thar any excitement or anything more'n common a-goin' on over to yer house that makes ye hurry so?"

"Oh, no, I was coming to invite you all to tea. It is Cousin Tom's birthday and I thought that it would be nice to celebrate."

"Grand idee! William has gone to the blacksmith to git his hoss shod. He'll be

back by noon or a bit later, but Wife, she's to home so ye can arrange it with her."

"All right—" and I started on my way.

"Say, thar, wait a minute! Is thar anyone over to yer house that can turn a grindstone? I want to sharpen this bush scythe."

"No, I don't think there is. Cousin Tom has been gone some time. Can't I do it?"

"Guess ye can, but ye needn't. I kin git along some way."

"Yes, I will come back and help you. Then I will write a note and you can take it over," and I walked back with him to where the grindstone stood under an apple-tree in the orchard. He put a little water on the stone and I turned the crank. His tongue and the stone commenced to go at the same time.

"Guess I won't bear down very hard, 'cause if I do ye'll git tired mighty quick. William allus did hate to turn this grindstun, but he done it, jest the same. He's been a dreadful good boy."

"That makes it easy for you," I said.

"Wa'al, the idee on't was he had the right kind of a mother. He couldn't help bein' good, nohow. Wife's father was ole Squire

Potter an' he belonged to one of the first fam'lies. The ole Squire was dreadful proud spurited, an' William, he's a perfec' picture of him. Yes, William's clear Potter. Wife an' I went to distric' school together an' she was the prettiest gal in the hull school. She went to boardin' school arter that an' I had to stay to home an' work. I allus was a great, overgrown, awkward boy, an' arter we got older I didn't stan' no chance with Parson Elliott's son. He had more book learnin' an' citified ways. She chose him instead of me, an' he made her a good husband, too, only he hadn't no calc'lation about gittin' along—couldn't seem to make much money, or keep it arter he did git any, an' arter he died, she an' the leetle boy had pretty hard times a-gittin' along. So, arter a while I persuaded her to marry me, an' let me help edicate the boy. I tol' her I'd edicate him any way he wanted us to, an' I did it. It cost a lot o' money gittin' him through college, but we fin'ly did it, an' I tell ye, I'm pretty proud of the job!"

"Yes, Cousin Tom said he was the smartest scholar in his class."

"Took arter his father fur book learnin',

an' arter his gran'father Potter fur shrewdness. Sufferin' Peter, how that boy did take to swappin' afore he was knee-high to a johnny-cake! He could beat me swappin' hosses when he was fifteen. A real, good judge of hoss-flesh gits took in middlin' often, but he didn't git cheated any oftener than more experienced hands at the business. He was allus partic'lar, though, about his word. He was nat'rally truthful. If we could only git a promise out of him he would keep his word if it killed him. Thar! that scythe be sharp enough," and he drew his finger carefully along the edge. "Ye needn't turn the stun eny more. Much obliged to ye. Ye done first rate."

"You are welcome," I laughed; "I guess you didn't bear down very hard, for I didn't mind it at all."

"Maybe not. Now I'll sit down an' wait while ye go in an' git yer note ready 'cause I might forgit to speak about it."

"You will be sure to come over with the others?" I asked when I returned with the note.

"Wa'al, maybe; but I ain't no han' to visit—though I thank ye jes' the same."

He went down across the meadow on his way to the pasture, with the scythe over his shoulder.

It was late in the afternoon of the same day. Mrs. Palmer and Aunt Jane were busily sewing at one end of the veranda. Will Elliott sat on the veranda steps reading a paper while I sat in a little willow chair reading a letter which Will Elliott had brought in the mail when he came back from the blacksmith's. I had just finished the letter and looked up to say something when I saw Ebenezer Palmer coming up across the meadow. He was walking very rapidly for him and something about him caught my attention. He seemed greatly excited. Something had happened, I felt sure. Will Elliott stood up to see what I was looking at and an anxious look spread across his face. The bush scythe was over Ebenezer's shoulder and he carried a tin can in the other hand.

"Come," I whispered so Mrs. Palmer would not hear. I ran down the garden path followed by Mr. Elliott. Visions of a horrible cut from the sharp scythe went through my mind as I hurried on and other thoughts of something equally terrible having occurred.

"Tell me!" I demanded, when we were within hearing distance. Will Elliott had caught up with me and was holding my hand tightly, with the idea, I suppose, of detaining me if the accident was too horrible for me to see.

Ebenezer did not heed us but kept on, his breath coming fast and the perspiration running down his face. We followed on after him, Will Elliott still holding my hand tightly and both of us looking for signs of an accident and wondering what it all meant.

"Oh, do tell us!" I implored, as he sank down on the veranda steps. Mrs. Palmer and Aunt Jane had come up by this time to hear what the trouble was. Even they could see that something had happened.

"Wa'al," he finally gasped out, "He's done it!"

"Done what? Who?" I demanded.

"Proposed!"

"Who?"

"Why, yer cousin. He's proposed at last!"

The reaction caused Will Elliott to drop my hand and me to sit down very abruptly. Finally I asked in wonderment how he knew.

"I guess ye'd know if ye'd sot in that hot

sun as long as I did. The only wonder is that I was able to git here at all. I wouldn't live through another sech time if I knowed the hull town would git mad, an' I wonder myself, now, how I stood it."

"It is a pity about you, old man!" said Will Elliott, with a frown of disapproval. This brought a sparkling twinkle to the old man's eyes.

"Come, tell us all about it, please do!" I coaxed in a wheedling tone.

Will Elliott looked disapprovingly at me but it was of no use. I was determined to hear all about it. Aunt Jane and Mrs. Palmer were not above hearing about it, either, I noticed.

"Wa'al, it was this way. I was a-cuttin' brush along the stun-wall where our pasture j'ines yourn. I'd been at it some time when I cum to a great, thick clump right alongside the barway, so afore I begun to cut 'em, I thought I'd git a drink out o' this tin can here an' rest up a bit. Wa'al, I set down on a great stun an' took up this can to drink when somethin' cum 'plunk!' right in front of me. Moses an' the Prophets! I thought, s'pose that had hit me on the head! I picked

it up an' made up my mind that it was a golf ball, an' someone must be playing. I waited a minute or two thinking they would be arter it, and sure enough, they cum but instead of lookin' for the ball they sot down on the other side of the barway with that thick clump of brush between us. I thought I might scare 'em so I sat still. They had talked some time when I edged around to see which on ye it was," (here the old man looked at William with an amused, knowing look that provoked me a good deal for an instant) "an' I found out as I said. She was a-pinnin' a posey on the front of his coat an' seemed powerful particular how she done it, an' he was a-lookin' at her so steady an' earnest like ye'd think he never'd sot eyes on her afore, when everybody knowed they ain't done nothin' else but jest smile at each other since they've been here—an' how ye all can stand it is past my calc'lations!

"Wa'al, to go on, he asked fin'ly—'Do ye know what would be the most precious birthday present I could have?' 'No, really,' she said back to him, an' at that he grabbed right on to her hands an' held on!"

We were all in spasms of laughter by this

time, he had acted out the entire scene. Even the disapproving son was almost in convulsions. As soon as we quieted down a little, Ebenezer went on.

“‘Sufferin’ Jerusalem!’ I said to myself, ‘it won’t do to interrupt now’—an’ I sot down again on that stun an’ waited till that stun got so hard it warn’t human nater to endure it no longer! So I riz up an’ took another look. He had his arm aroun’ her an’ she had her head agin his shoulder an’ he was a-sayin’, ‘Are ye sure ye love me?’ an’ she says, ‘Yes, sure!’ while she wiped her eyes. What in canopy, if she was sure, she was a-sheddin’ tears about is more’n I can understan’! Fin’ly he asked, ‘Why do ye cry?’ an’ she says, ‘Because I’m so happy!’ an’, I vow, they kep’ that right up till it warn’t in human nater an’ endurance to stand that hard stun no longer. Besides, I’d heard enough. It jest made me sick!

So I crawled away on my hands an’ knees an’ here I be, though I don’t b’lieve they would’ve heard a cannon if it had busted right under their noses, an’ I know I shall be lamer tomorrow than I was when I chased that pig!”

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" gasped Aunt Jane and Mrs. Palmer both.

"Can't you remember any more? Please try!" I coaxed in a wheedling tone again.

"Ain't that enough? I vow, if you'd sot thar as long as I did you'd think it more'n enough!" Ebenezer's little blue eyes were fairly dancing, and it was my opinion he had heard all that had been said.

"Did Eleanor say yes?"

"Must have," answered Ebenezer. "Thar they be a-comin' up the road, now. Guess I'll be a-goin'." He took up the scythe and walked away rather fast for an old man that had "sot on a hard stun in the hot sun" for hours.

"Say," he called back to us, "I shan't be back for tea."

"The old villain doesn't dare to," said Will Elliott, laughing and shaking his fist at the vanishing figure of the old man. Then he went and sat down beside his mother and we waited for Cousin Tom and Eleanor to come up. They both had a dreamy, pre-occupied look. This deadened their perceptions.

"Let me put away your golf sticks," said Aunt Jane to break the embarrassing silence.

"No, I will do that," said Tom with an air of possession that nearly upset us all again. He took the golf sticks and put them in the rack in the hall and did not come out again.

"I guess I will go to my room and get ready for tea," said Eleanor, meekly.

"Was it warm in the sun?" inquired Mrs. Palmer.

"Not very," she answered and went upstairs.

A little later Aunt Jane called us all to tea. Will Elliott did most of the talking. He did it, I think, to be good to Tom. Aunt Jane was busy with the tea things and did not look up as she said:

"It is too bad, Tom, to think you haven't had a single birthday present. Just think—a birthday and no present!"

Tom's eyes stopped on their journey around the table when they met Eleanor's, and they told the same story we already knew so well that we avoided one another's eyes.

"Where do you buy your tea?" inquired Mrs. Palmer, to relieve the tension.

After that we managed to finish our supper

in safety. The lamps had to be lighted before we finished. Tom seemed to realize we were more joyous than usual. There was a look of contentment and even sweetness in his eyes and around his mouth that told us he was at peace with his present surroundings, if not with the whole world.

When Will Elliott took his mother home, he said, as he bade Aunt Jane good-bye:

"I wish someone else would have a birthday. It was nice to come to tea, if we did not all have presents."

A little later out on the veranda in the slowly gathering darkness that hid our guilty faces, Cousin Tom told Aunt Jane and me of his engagement, and we were truly glad, for now Eleanor was one of the family by right. After a while I left them and slowly wandered down the garden path, feeling just a little lonesome.

The moon was coming up over the hill beyond the valley, and the floating clouds made shadows of the shrubbery, casting a pale light on a man leaning over the garden gate. I thought there was something familiar about that dark shadow and I wandered slowly towards it.

"You ought to be afraid, wandering around the garden all alone," said he, and I recognized the voice of Will Elliott.

"I am," I laughed. Then he opened the gate, came in and we walked up the path together.

"Will you come to the seat in the orchard? I want to talk something over with you."

I assented, and we walked slowly to the seat under the trees.

"I am glad you came back," I said, "for I was feeling lonesome. Tom and Eleanor do not want me—their engagement is too recent. After a little they will remember and be kind."

"Look at the moon," he said. "There will not be a nice old moon like that in the city where I am going."

So he was going away. I wondered where but did not ask.

"Someone is looking very nice tonight and we must not let anything happen to the gown." He dusted the bench with his hat.

"Do you like my dress?"

"Yes, and the one that wears it even better."

"Thank you, that's really quite remark-

able!" I think he felt sufficiently foolish for having made such a remark for he sat down beside me and did not say anything for some time. There was no laughter in his eyes now. A wistful look changed the usual gladness of his face.

"What was it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"I wanted to tell you and Tom that I have to go away in the morning on business that cannot be put off."

"For how long?" I was getting that lonesome feeling again.

"I cannot tell. I may be gone a week, or I may be gone a month—possibly more. It will all depend upon circumstances. I shall stay and fight it out for it will mean a good lot of money coming my way."

"What did you want me to do—wish you success?"

"Yes, that will help, but I wanted to say good-bye. I was just making up my mind to disturb Tom when I saw you walking in the garden."

"I want to ask you something," I said; "May I?"

"What is it?"

"Why didn't you let Tom know just where you lived and why didn't you keep up the old friendship if you thought so much of each other?"

"Because I was sensitive. I know now that I was foolishly so. I was very young at the time—that is my only excuse. My people and I had always lived in a simple way and he was not accustomed to it. He and his people, I knew, had always lived a different sort of life from mine; they had plenty of money while my people did not, and I knew it was useless to begin what I could not keep up. Besides, my mother wanted me to stay at home."

"I knew it must have been your fault, for surely you knew where Tom was."

"Yes, I know now that I ought to have kept up the friendship, but I hadn't the money, as I have said, to live in Tom's world so I kept out of it."

"Poor boy!" I laughed. "After all your good resolutions, Tom's world came to you—moved in next door, in fact. But it wasn't our fault, we didn't know. Please do not blame us for it—it was just an accident."

"No, it wasn't an accident; it was fate.

Come," he said, getting up quickly, "come before I make an idiot of myself! I must say good-bye to you and I can't!"

"It isn't late, what makes you hurry?"

"Don't you understand it is because I don't want to go? It has been the happiest time of my life, and I don't want to miss a day of it. You and your people have been so good to me. This summer has been one long, happy dream and I want to thank you for your goodness to me and my people. And I thank you again for your charity."

He sat down again, with his elbow on his knee, his head resting on his hand, the moonlight shining on his face, looking up at me. I was startled at what I saw in the look; then my eyes evaded his. There was no mistaking his meaning; I could hear it in every intonation, every pause; and I grew fearfully diffident.

"You'll be here when I come back, won't you? You are not going back when Tom and Miss Roberts go, are you?"

"No, I intend to stay until October or possibly November; but you will let me say that Aunt Jane and I are both grateful to you and yours."

“And—and there is nothing else? Nothing but friendliness and gratitude?”

“N-o. Please do not make me sorry that I came; don’t spoil my summer, for it has been a dear and happy time.”

“Ah! I understand,” he said, getting up again. “Nothing so wonderful as your caring would actually happen; but promise me that you will think about it while I am away; won’t you?”

I did not answer.

“Come,” he said gently, “we will go now, and tell Tom that I am going in the morning.”

For a moment I hesitated; then I followed him silently out of the orchard, up the garden path to the veranda, where Tom sat smoking all alone. I said “Good night,” and left them to talk of their business, undisturbed; then I went to bed, but not to sleep. Little voices of the night, mingling with the odors of the garden, came in at the open window. I tried not to think—not yet—not even in my dreams did I want to know anything about the future—what it might be.

CHAPTER XVI

VACATION WAS over and Cousin Tom and Eleanor were gone. Aunt Jane and I had settled down to our quiet life once more. The fields of corn were fast disappearing and the apples were ripening in the late summer sunshine. On the highway and bordering the fields the goldenrod looked like a frame of gold. The woodbine on our garden wall was turning red, not to be outdone by Ebenezer's trumpet creeper, looking, as he said, as "gay as a little red wagon." Sunshine and summer rains had hastened the harvest. The hot summer months had gone and with them most of my flowers. Poor old garden, its beauty was fast departing. The bed of zinnias were all that remained faithful until the last. As long as it rained occasionally, they turned their bright faces to the sun and seemed to say, "Only love us and we will be faithful."

How I missed my friends. I wished they

were like the poor—"always with us—" but the good things of this earth seemed to be dealt out with a miser's hand. Mr. Palmer, poor man, appeared to miss them as much as I. Even my dog wandered about discontentedly refusing to eat or to be comforted, and Aunt Jane had been frankly dismal.

There was something strange about Aunt Jane during the last few months. I had been so busy with my own affairs and my friends that I had not been as observing as usual, but I had noticed her and James talking quite earnestly and one afternoon they sat a long while on the rustic bench in the orchard, deep in an animated discussion over something.

I ran in after my field glasses, but realizing that it would be mean to watch them, I went over to the Palmers' to keep away from temptation. I felt quite sure she had found out about James and that he was looking for Uncle's money, but would not tell me fearing it would make me afraid. I wished that I knew, for it would make it so much easier for both of us to work together, it seemed to me.

Aunt Jane was a born aristocrat, whether she realized it or not, and I knew she had

too much family pride to fall in love with a servant. James as such a possibility was out of the question. There was some other solution of the mystery. "Seek and ye shall find," Great-uncle commanded us. Possibly Aunt Jane had gone over to the enemy and was helping him. Well, it was nothing to me if she had.

Aunt Jane was a very bright woman at fifty years of age and had always lived a life of comparative leisure, so she must have some independent income, I concluded, in which case she perhaps had no real interest in the hidden treasure. I felt sure James could not deceive her very much, so they could hunt together if they were so inclined, and I would search alone. I would begin again and now, I determined, and finally I decided to search the cellar.

I lighted a lantern and went below, resolved to look into the utmost recesses of that dark place. Quietly descending the stairs, having closed the door after me, I sat down on the last step to study the situation and plan where to begin work. It was a large cellar. Here and there I could see a faint light where a window had been boarded up. There was

a deep corridor that extended under the long kitchen. All was still. The damp, chill air, the underground mustiness and the darkness gave me a creepy feeling.

There were casks and boxes on the ground near the outer walls, and when the light from the lantern fell upon them they looked like grewsome ghosts in that tomb-like place. A great rat scurried across a patch of light, paralyzing me for a moment with terror.

Then something of more importance happened. Someone opened the outside cellar door at the far end of the long kitchen extension. I hastily turned the lantern down and covered it with my dress skirt. Here, without a doubt, was my friend James. My chance was good to go back up the stairs if he came my way. My teeth chattered and the chills ran up and down my back at the rate of a thousand a minute. I thought of all the brave women I had ever read about in history to keep up my courage. I put my hand over my mouth so I should not scream if he came my way. Oh, how I did wish I had taken my revolver with me. I watched him coming towards me along the corridor. I did not like the thought of being

found alone in a dark cellar. I let him approach, unconscious that he was being watched. My eyes opened wider and wider with excitement. I longed to run but was determined to see the end, whatever happened.

When he was directly under the kitchen he stopped and listened; then he tapped softly on the boards over his head three times. He repeated this twice. Then I heard an answering tap from above at which he walked back to the open door. I followed slowly and carefully, not making a sound. In the light of the open door I saw Susan. Not a word was spoken. They walked into the sunlight and out of my hearing. They talked for a minute; then he went off and she came into the house.

"Hm!" I breathed, "What does that mean?" One thing I was sure of—I had lost my desire to search the cellar. Aunt Jane or anyone else was welcome to explore that dark, grewsome place.

I left the lantern on the cellar stairs. I did not care to face Susan just yet; I wanted to think it over first. I went to the veranda and looked down into the valley, and after a while, my thoughts were under better control

and I could see things that had been confused before.

Mr. Elliott had the key to the mystery. He said the day we found Grandmother's picture that he did not know where Uncle's money was, though he was sure there was some. I felt convinced that the Palmer family held themselves responsible for the money and that Will Elliott, when the time came to read the letter, wanted to pass it along to the one it belonged to. They perhaps felt that in the meantime the least said about it the better; so they had hired James to work for us and search for the money in a quiet way. But I vowed I would make him tell me if I ever saw him again.

My mind thus set at rest, I began to realize how long he had been away. I wished he would come home. Even the beautiful autumn hues would have a richer, gayer tone if I had someone to enjoy them with me. Nature had come with her box of colors and had given the trees in the valley their first coat. I always thought of Mr. Elliott as a part of that picture. We saw it together the day I arrived. He saw the charm, the beauty and the restfulness of it

when it wore its winter browns and he would enjoy it now in its gay attire, and I wished him with me to see it before Jack Frost arrived. All but the dark green cedars would then gradually lose their mantles of glory. How restful, too, were those evergreens and how firm and steadfast, pointing upwards always. Lifting my eyes to the hillside, I noted the golden sunbeams shining on the foliage there, putting life and light into every quivering branch and leaf and gradually merging into the purple line of the far away hills.

"Ah! yonder comes Mr. Palmer with the mail. With his cheery smile he chases away all sombre thoughts and makes one feel that the world is a pretty good place, after all."

"Say," he said, after a few moment's conversation, having settled himself comfortably on the doorstep and lighting his pipe; "they tell me ye be a-goin' to have a church supper."

"Yes, the ladies of the church have asked me to."

"Hm! Wa'al, I'd like to advise ye a bit and tell ye not to git up any extry. Ye see, it causes jealousies. I s'pose ye know it's easy to stir up jealousies, though I don't

s'pose they'd mind what ye did as they would each other that they've knowed all thar lives. Now I'll give ye an example. Thar is an ole maid, Lucy Little. She thought she'd outdo her neighbors by havin' hot house flowers. Had her table all decked out with 'em an' the rest of the women that couldn't afford to buy 'em was mad an' jealous. Then thar was Mrs. Lawson. She had the next supper. She wouldn't use the church dishes, so she went all 'round the neighborhood an' borrowed everybody's best silver an' chiney, an' I mus' say that table beat anything I ever see. It was so bright an' shinin'. Arter the lamps was lit, Lord o' Mighty! how that table did shine. But that settled it—they ain't had no church suppers since."

I asked if he and his wife would come.

"Cum? Yes, to be sure we'll cum, an' I wanted to tell ye that I'm glad ye'll bother with it, 'cause the ole church needs repairing dreadful."

"Say," he called, after he was down the garden path, "I do hope William will be home so he can help ye."

Aunt Jane and I had attended divine services occasionally at the little country church

where Mr. and Mrs. Palmer had been members for years. The congregation was only a little band of people, among them the old, white-haired deacon who always began his prayers with, "I've been on the road nigh unto forty years." Dear old soul! His call to lay down his load, that the journey was over, soon came and he entered into his reward.

The cemetery was on the sloping hillside near the church. Here Great-uncle rested, and a more peaceful or lovely spot could scarcely be imagined as the golden beams of sunlight fell upon it.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EVENTFUL day of the church supper arrived, and keeping Ebenezer's advice ever in mind, we made our arrangements. We ventured to put on our best long table cloth and arrange the church dishes.

At half-past seven the people began to arrive. By eight o'clock I was quite sure there were no more in the neighborhood to come, but they still came, even until ten o'clock. I afterwards learned that these late arrivals had come a long distance. Among the early comers were Mr. and Mrs. Palmer. The old man's face was all animation and excitement. He went from room to room with a cheerful word to everyone.

The ladies had arranged a short entertainment, having engaged a dear old couple to read to them. The old gentleman read a funny selection and was duly applauded. This was followed by a reading from the little

woman—"The New Church Organ," by Will Carlton and when the time arrived she

"Drew her red bandanna out,
And wiped her weeping eyes."

This was a great success and was applauded with enthusiasm.

After the entertainment, the business of the evening began, and tableful after tableful was served until all had eaten. When everyone was busy I slipped out on to the veranda. It was quite late and the slender moon had dropped behind the far away hills. It was a starlit night and I was awed by the stillness and the peacefulness of the sleeping country. I stood there lost in a dream of the night when someone came up on the veranda and looked into the front room, and as he stood in the lamplight I could see that it was James.

By the window inside stood Aunt Jane. After a moment James knocked softly on the glass, just loud enough to attract her attention and motioned for her to come out. Hesitating for an instant, she glided through the hall and out on to the porch. I kept perfectly still and was filled with amazement. What could it mean?

"Hush!" she whispered, "someone will see or hear us."

"I don't care if the whole world sees us. I wish it would, then you would end my misery. Ah, how like the old Jane that I have always loved you look tonight! I have been looking at you from the outside all the evening. It is the same dress you wore twenty-five years ago tonight, or one like it. I remember that was gray."

"No, ashes of roses."

"Call it what you like, it is the same color and made almost like it. Your hair is arranged the same only it is powdered with white now, but that does not make me love you any the less, but the more. You are the one woman and the only one that I ever loved. You know that, do you not?"

Aunt Jane caught her breath and there was a sound like a sob.

"For twenty-five years you have known how I love you, yet you have not loved me enough to trust me. Twenty-five years! That is a long, long time to wait, dear."

"Yes, I know," said Aunt Jane. "Ah! don't I know?"

"Do you trust me now?"

"Hush! We must not stay here. I think I heard someone."

"Answer my question—think quickly!"

"I do not want to answer tonight."

"Why, dear?"

"Because—"

"It is our anniversary tonight and I must have that answer now or never. I shall not ask you again. I am waiting."

"Well—" she took a long breath. The stillness was intense. I held my breath. If the situation was not changed soon, I felt that I should scream. I wondered if it would not be a good thing to save Aunt Jane the pain of answering James. Of all men, a servant and an old lover of Aunt Jane, and she a descendant of one of the old families! She had always been regarded by her friends and in society as an elegant woman with inherited pride and social position. I wondered if I were dreaming. Could it be that that woman so near to me that I could put my hand out and touch her was my Aunt Jane—my stately, correct aunt, actually listening to the suit of a servant!

"I am waiting," he whispered softly in her ear, "do not be afraid—say it."

"Perhaps I do." With this Aunt Jane slipped under his arm and the next instant disappeared through the front door and was soon lost amid the assembled people.

"Ah, at last!" he murmured and walked to and fro, deep in thought. In the darkness I could not see his face, and I wondered how long I should have to stay there in the shadow of the vine. As he passed the lighted window, he drew his hand suddenly out of his pocket and something dropped to the floor. He turned and went down the steps, unheeding. I listened to the echo of his footsteps until they became faint in the distance. Then I stepped out of my hiding-place, picked up the wad of paper James had dropped and smoothed it out. It was a note of some kind about the size of a bill, possibly larger. I went around to the side door, and taking the paper to the light, read it. It was a returned cheque and said: "Pay to the order of William Elliott Four Hundred Dollars." It was signed "James N. Judson" and the date was June the 20th of that year.

"Judson!" Where and when had I heard that name? It kept running through my mind all the rest of the evening.

I watched Aunt Jane closely. There was a bright red spot on each cheek and her eyes were shining; otherwise she was her usual quiet self, going among the people with a pleasant word and smile. I had lost all interest in the supper and wished it was over.

Ebenezer was still visiting among the evidently happy throng.

“What did I tell ye—didn’t I say thar wouldn’t be any trouble about your supper?” he exclaimed enthusiastically when he bade us good-night. “It’s ’cause ye’ve got some gumption. Everything moved along tip-top, an’ I think we’ve took in quite a proper bunch of money.”

I asked Aunt Jane what he meant by “gumption” and she said she thought he meant common sense.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL THAT night, asleep or awake, I dreamed and the name "Judson" seemed to come out of a mysterious distance. James North and Judson were one and the same man. James North was a servant; James North Judson was a very rich man. I could see it all clearly now. He was an old lover of Aunt Jane's, and in order to be near her, he had put on the wig and played the part of a servant. Mr. Palmer's family knew all about it. I wondered how long she had known who he was, and determined to satisfy my curiosity in this regard. In the meantime, what should I do about it? Ought I to do anything? Why should I interfere? Still I knew I must. It was given to me to know that I was to help in some way; but how? He was a man with a quick temper. Perhaps that was what had stood between them all these years. "Do you trust me now?" he had asked her, and it had taken her twenty-five years to answer,

"Perhaps." I wondered if there had been silence all these years between them, and what it was that had kept them apart.

The next morning Aunt Jane stayed in bed, complaining that she had a bad headache. Susan and I puttered around the house all the morning, I making frequent visits to Aunt Jane's room. She said she would be all right in a little while and not to bother; if she were left alone she thought a nap would cure her. So I darkened the room and went out to the garden, and here I found James wandering in an aimless way, up and down, up and down. I felt that I must interfere. I went over to a corner where there was a good seat and sat down. In a few minutes my mind was made up.

"James!" I called. "Come here. I have something to say to you." He came slowly and he looked anything but pleased.

"Sit down." He did as I requested.

"Here is something I found. Do you know who James North Judson is?" and I handed him the cheque I had found the previous evening.

He gave me a quick searching look, but answered quietly: "The name sounds familiar.

Perhaps after a while the particulars may come to me."

"I think they will," I said, bending down and picking up a twig. "I was out on the veranda last evening when Aunt Jane and a man were talking about old times."

His breath stopped. I still played with the twig and did not look up. This gave him time to recover himself, for when I did look up, his face was calm and his manner composed.

"And who, may I ask, was the man?"

"Truly, I do not know, but I think I could guess. That name on the cheque has cleared up several things that have been a mystery to me all summer."

"You will excuse me," he said grimly. "I must go and be earning my living or Mr. Palmer will discharge me."

"That is just what I have made up my mind to do for him. You may consider yourself discharged. It may interest you to know that Aunt Jane is expecting an old friend of hers to call, a Mr. Judson from the city, a gentleman she knew before she came here. My aunt Jane will not associate with servants."

"Did she tell you to say that?"

"No, she does not know that I was on the veranda last evening and I shall never tell her. She is sick in bed this morning with a headache, and if there should be a letter or a note or anything that would make her happy to read, I will see that she has it."

His eyes were kept straight along the garden path. He seemed not to see or hear. I felt a little afraid—I did not understand his mood. Besides, it seemed absurd that I should be entering into their lives at this point, and they old enough for my mother and father. Suddenly he laughed happily, and I felt relieved.

"You are a brick! I am glad that you are to have a respectable visitor. The letter will be ready in a few minutes, but Susan will see that your aunt has it. I will attend to everything. You can go to the woods and dig flowers or anything else you want to. Good-bye, child. You are like your aunt in many ways." I knew that was the highest compliment he could possibly pay me.

"Wait!" I said, "I want to tell you more about Aunt Jane's visitor. It has been rumored that he is very wealthy and when he

comes to call it is possible that he may come in an automobile, one of those great, touring cars; or he may come in a coach drawn by a pair of prancing horses, jingling their gold-mounted harnesses, and making such a commotion that even the hens will scatter in every direction. The inhabitants of the farm will stand around in open-eyed wonder and I will announce to Aunt Jane, 'Behold, the conquering hero! He comes!'"

His laugh followed me as I ran out of the garden. I went to the woods as he suggested and was gone a long time. When I returned James was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO DAYS of rain followed James' departure, and for want of something else to do I wandered and loitered about the house, while Aunt Jane appeared preoccupied and distraught. What was uppermost on the minds of both of us, each kept strictly to herself.

Susan told her that Mr. Palmer had discharged James but that she would stay if we wanted her a "spell" longer. Aunt Jane replied that she would be glad to have her help us until we went to the city for good. She did not know when that would be but she thought before long.

"For my part," continued Susan, "I don't see how Miss Ruth will manage about the garden now James is gone." I wondered who Susan was and how much she knew about James.

The wind had changed and was drying up the wet earth together with the sun which was breaking through the clouds. I went out

to the veranda and walked to and fro waiting for the mail. Now that Mr. Elliott and James were both gone, we did not get it so regularly. When it was pleasant I went to Mr. Palmer's myself after it.

The Palmers had not mentioned James in any way, and I wondered if he told them that I discharged him. If Mr. Elliott were only home he could smooth out so many questions that keep coming up in my mind, I assured myself; but the thought only made me the more impatient. I did wish something would happen, everything seemed so dismal, almost funereal. I feared that after all Aunt Jane's love affair might turn out a tragedy instead of a comedy as I had considered it up to that moment. At the earliest possible minute, I determined, I would ask Mr. Elliott to explain this new development to me and if he proved obdurate, then there was but one course left to pursue, and that was to write to Cousin Tom and let him investigate the matter. Not one word had I heard from Mr. Elliott since he went away except what his mother happened to think to tell me.

"Ah! here comes the man with the mail," I exclaimed aloud as he appeared at the

farther end of the garden path, and in the vague hope that something would occur to liven things up a little, I rushed down to meet him.

"A box! For whom? Me?"

I seized it and the other mail and ran up the stairs fumbling with the string. I could not wait to untie it so I grabbed the garden shears and cut it, tore open the wrappings and opened it. My heart nearly stopped beating when I saw the contents.

"Oh, what beauties!" I exclaimed to Aunt Jane who had seen the man coming with it.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"Roses! Great, beautiful roses! Look, Aunt Jane, what beauties they are—the largest ones I ever saw!"

"Yes, they certainly are beautiful. Who sent them?"

"I don't know, but I thank whoever it is."

"Tom was always extravagant," she remarked; then she gathered the papers together and went in out of the wind. I fumbled among the roses in the box, looking for a card. I found it and the name was "William Elliott," and under this was written, "Just to keep you from forgetting." That was all,

but the roses told all kinds of stories, glad, beautiful stories, gay and happy stories.

"Oh, how sweet and beautiful!" and tears, happy tears filled my eyes. I brushed them quickly away for fear someone would see me, then I took the roses and put them carefully in water.

"Just to keep you from forgetting." I repeated it over and over to myself as I lifted each one gently from the box. When the last one was finally arranged to suit me I said softly to myself, "You need not have been afraid, I cannot forget you."

I left them and went into the garden. My thoughts wandered backward all the journey that the roses had come, to the one who had sent them. I knew just how he looked when he wrote, "Just to keep you from forgetting."

Sunset came into the garden. The birds sang and twittered in the trees. A hawk hung in the air over the maple trees in the valley. Crickets chirruped in the grass and the katydid said that katydidn't in the shrubbery. But I was unconscious of it all. I only knew what the roses were saying—"Just to keep you from forgetting." To me, everything in the garden was saying it. I

walked around my bed of zinnias; each one waved in the breeze and said it, over and over. At last I went into the house only to go and look at the roses, and they were still breathing it softly in the twilight, over and over, and as I closed the door I whispered back to them, "No, I will not forget."

I wandered into the living-room, sat down before the desk and opened the little drawer that held Grandmother's picture. "Seek and ye shall find," it said. "What? Shall I ever know?" I queried. "Some time, somewhere," Grandmother seemed to say to me; "have patience, all in good time. 'Everything comes to him who waits.'"

I wondered if she knew about the roses—"Just to keep me from forgetting."

I must have gone off in a reverie with my hand on the handle of the half-opened drawer, and with a dreamy desire to look at the roses once more, attempted to rise, half lost my balance and to keep from falling pressed heavily on the drawer, and as though by magic out flew a long, shallow drawer directly under the other taking in the entire length of the desk.

"Goodness!" I exclaimed, brought suddenly

to full consciousness, "What does that mean! 'Seek and ye shall find.' Have I found it?" I wondered what I had better do—call Aunt Jane? "No, not yet; I will find out what it contains," I reflected. "Ah, Grandmother, you have guarded these treasures long and carefully and I seem to be the one you have selected to confide in and trust them to." I decided to examine the contents slowly and carefully, but, first of all I went and got the roses and placed them where they would be near me.

There were a number of bank-books, papers of various kinds, and a sealed package directed to William Elliott, to be opened in October—by him or in his presence, if he were living; if not, to be opened by one Ebenezer Palmer. The package he spoke of the day we found Grandmother's picture must be a copy of this one, I thought, and I wondered if there was a method in Great-uncle's whim. Mr. Elliott seemed to think there was.

October was come and Mr. Elliott would surely be home in a few days; so I decided not to examine the bank-books and papers but to wait till he came.

"Dear little Grandmother," I murmured *as*

I looked at her picture, "Great-uncle knew that you would guard his treasures well. I have found you, Grandmother, nestling secure and safe in that lovely, old-fashioned case, our Great-uncle's most precious treasure, hidden away from curious eyes, amongst his earthly possessions. Good-night, Grandmother," I said, closing the little drawer, "other eyes than mine will visit you before many days and then you will be free. Great-uncle's possessions will pass on to other hands, but I am glad that I was the one you chose to help you guard Great-uncle's treasures. I will take your place and be, the 'Lady of Round Hill Farm'."

CHAPTER XX

GAY AND beautiful was all the country. Never did Autumn paint a more gorgeous picture than that maple swamp down in the valley. There were all shades and tints of bronze, crimson and gold. No two trees were alike in color, and sometimes a soft, transparent blue haze hovered over the valley while each day brought with it more and more evidence of a coming frost.

Mr. Elliott had not yet returned. A letter from Cousin Tom said that Eleanor and he were coming soon to make another visit and see the farm when all the country was in its gayest attire.

One bright, brisk morning Ebenezer came down the lane driving a pair of horses, harnessed to a great empty farm-wagon. I was seized with a great desire to do something this glorious morning, so I called out to him:

“Where are you going?”

"Down to the wood lot to git a load of wood," he shouted back.

"Please, may I go?" I asked as I caught up with the advancing team.

"Yes, I s'pose ye can. Git right in an' hold the reins while I open the gate."

I climbed in and sat down on a board that answered for a seat, took the reins and prepared to drive.

"Ye be careful an' not hit the gate post with the hind wheel when ye drive through, for that off hoss is mighty skittish. I don't like to trust ye with him."

I promised to be careful and had driven the team about half way through, when I heard a rumbling noise that made the horses start and almost instantly an automobile came tooting and whizzing around a bend in the road. Like a flash of lightning the horses gave one mighty leap up in the air, then turned sharply to the right and flew like the wind. Ebenezer jumped quickly, reaching for the horses' bridle, but was not quick enough and just missed being hit by the wheel of the wagon as it went swiftly by him.

"Hold 'em tight! Keep 'em to the road!"

he shouted, but his voice sounded way in the distance by the time it reached me. On we dashed in our mad career. The board that answered for a seat dropped at one end and then was gone altogether. This threw me down and I bounced around on the floor of the wagon, but I still held the reins tightly and managed to get up on my knees. How that wagon swayed and bounded along, and how I bumped and thumped as we flew over that rough, stony road! No monk in the days of torture ever had his knees hammered as mine were! But we reached the end of the long hill without accident. I had managed to keep the horses in the road thus far. Next I had a long, level stretch of road and after that a long hill to go up. If everything held together and we did not meet a team, I thought I might get them to walk going up the long hill. Suddenly the horses started on a faster run and I was conscious of a noise behind me. I turned just enough to see the automobile coming at lightning speed. "What in the world did they do that for," (I remember thinking calmly) "haven't they made trouble enough?" I changed the reins from both hands to one and put my other

arm around a wagon stake that still remained and braced myself.

On and on we went across the level stretch of road, the horses wild with fear. It seemed as though they had wings—they went so fast. Object after object along the roadside, at another time familiar to me, was merged into a confused mass. If I was afraid, I did not know it. It was a new sensation; I felt every nerve vibrating and every muscle was braced to meet the end. The wind roared in my ears, whipping and fluttering my clothes. All at once the automobile shot suddenly by at one side and slowed up and a man swung himself out, made for the back of my wagon, caught it, and after several attempts, managed to crawl in like a cat. He seemed glued to the swaying, bumping wagon. He crawled slowly up where I was, reached over and took the reins out of my hand. I settled back against the side board; the tension was over—the responsibility was taken by another.

The horses seemed to know instantly that an experienced and controlling hand held them, for they slackened their mad pace and the wagon swayed and bumped less violently. It had seemed previously that at every leap

the horses made, the back-end of the wagon would be snapped away. They kept prancing in jerks until they were about half way up the hill. I breathed a long sigh of relief; the moment for relaxation had come and I remembered to look and see who it was that had risked so much to save me.

"Mr. Elliott!" I cried, for it was he. His face was white beneath the tan and his eyes shone with excitement.

"We are safe now," he said; then he turned and waved to the people in the automobile. They evidently understood, for they backed the automobile around and went back along the level bit of road. Mr. Elliott stood looking down at me.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured.

I didn't know before that tears were running down my face, but I knew it now for there was a something, a quality in his voice that swept away all my nerve. I put my head down against the side board and cried hysterically.

"Please, don't! I beg you to tell me if you are hurt, after all. Try and tell me!"

But, try as I would, I could not control it. Fear and excitement, relief and gladness, had

followed too quickly and my poor nerves must find relief somehow.

The horses were still nervous and demanded his undivided attention and the situation must have been trying, to say the least; but he was a young man of great power of mind and wonderful resource. He turned the horses into a wooded cart path, stopped them, then jumped out and tied them securely to a good-sized tree.

I had cried enough, by this time, to relieve my feelings and was wiping my eyes when he came back to the wagon. Kneeling down on the floor of the wagon beside me, he handed me his handkerchief to take the place of mine that was thoroughly wet with the recent shower of tears it had had to meet.

"Are you hurt anywhere?"

"N-o, I don't think I am."

"Will you stand up and let me find out if I am?"

He helped me as I rose slowly to my feet. My knees were growing stiff and painful. I was about to take a step when one of the horses gave a nervous jump. At this, both my knees seemed to break. "Oh!" I groaned, and made a frantic grab in the air. He

caught me before I went over backwards and looked down at me.

"Please don't mind—" I was going to explain that it was only my knees, but he interrupted, having evidently reached the limit of his endurance.

"If anything more happens to you I shall go insane. It seems to me I have seen some new horror every instant. After I first saw you flying down the road behind those frantic horses, there was nothing that could possibly happen to you that I did not imagine would befall you. Oh, it was awful! I saw you under the horses' feet, then under the great heavy wheels, then dashed against the stone wall. I could not and would not picture to you half the horrors that tortured me. I would not live through it again—I could not! Dear heart, if ever you live to love anyone as I do you and see them about to be hurled to instant death, you will know how I feel, and forgive me." He was still holding me tightly in his arms and I could feel great, trembling sighs that seemed to come from the very depths of his heart. I reached up my hand and held it against his quivering face.

"Please do not feel so—I am not hurt, it

is only my knees, they are bruised some but not very badly."

"Are you sure? Do not deceive me—tell me truly, if you know yourself." His voice betrayed a tremor still. He could not believe that my injuries were so slight.

"Yes, I am sure. I bumped along quite a ways on my knees, and the wagon wasn't exactly as comfortable as a cushioned carriage. But lame knees are not very dangerous," and I smiled up reassuringly at him.

"Can you stand on them?" he asked, and his eyes began to lose that terrified look and he swallowed several times as if something was in his throat that choked him.

"Oh, yes," I replied, "they are only a bit battered and wobbly." I wished he would put me down, but he did not seem to think of it. He was looking down at me with a light in his eyes that grew and grew until I hid my face in his coat.

"Oh, my little Lady of Round Hill Farm, I am back home at last. And, dear, I have thought of you and dreamed of you every day since I went away—and then to find you in such danger upon my return!" He gasped and was silent for a long time.

"This is the second time you have rescued me; don't you think it time I went back to the city? I have been rushing the accidents this season. You appeared on the spot just at the right moment each time. Why, anyone that did not know would say that the whole thing was planned." I had found courage to look at him again.

"Came too near tragedy to suit me. Let me see if you can walk." Then he put me down gently.

"Where did you come from?" I asked, and I took several steps to convince him that I would not fall to pieces.

"I was in the automobile with Tom and Miss Roberts."

"Are they here?"

"Yes, they telephoned me to meet them at the Junction and we would come across country and surprise you."

"Well, I have been surprised quite enough for one day. Come, let's sit down. I want to ask you something, may I? And will you promise to answer it?"

"I don't know of anything I wouldn't tell you, but it is better not to promise."

"Then let us hurry home."

"Oh, I promise, if you will answer the question that I want answered."

"No, I am going home."

"What is it you want to know?"

"It's about James." Then I told him everything that had happened; all that I had seen, heard or said. "Now, will you tell me everything? Aunt Jane is my all in all, and I have a right to know."

"Very well; James is my mother's cousin. Possibly you have heard that he is very wealthy. I attend to considerable of his business. Well, it happened that he was in my office one day and a letter from your aunt lay on the desk. He recognized the writing instantly. He asked questions and I answered until he learned that she had arranged to spend the summer here on the farm. He told me enough of his past history for me to understand that he and your aunt were engaged once, but that because of his unreasonable and violent temper she broke the engagement. That was twenty-five years ago this summer, and once each year since then he has renewed his suit. This makes the twenty-fifth time, and he told me that this would be the last. His playing servant

began through a mistake. He liked to busy himself around the barn when he stayed with us. The day you came he had on an old hat of father's that covered his hair entirely. You mistook him for James and the idea came into his head to play the part. So that night I went to town, bought the wig, came home and told father and mother about it. They objected at first but finally consented to see it to the end—and father has enjoyed it to the utmost. I think your aunt Jane knew him the first day, the day the stove-pipe came down; that fit of temper she was very familiar with, but he did not know until recently that she knew. Since then he has improved each shining hour and the last act will be played before long."

"Who is Susan?"

"She is the sister of James Noxon, the man who takes care of the horses. They have been well paid to play their parts and to keep silence."

"All this bother over two women! You have been playing a game all summer. I suppose you both thought we would return to the city after a while and we would be none the wiser."

I was thoroughly annoyed at him for a few minutes. It was mean, and it made me angry. I was dizzy with resentment and defiance.

"Now, what a mess! I beg to you not to look at it that way. The play was begun before I had seen you or knew you. You have only to consult history to find excuse for poor James; besides, 'all is fair in love and war'."

"I have been an easy mark. Only an imbecile could have been fooled all these weeks. The comedy has been long drawn out. I hope you have found it sufficiently amusing."

I was hurt and puzzled beyond expression for I thought he was too good, or at least, too much my friend to do a thing like that.

"Do not, please, do not look at me like that. Can't I make you understand—won't you believe it was not a trick? It was not even thought of until you mistook James for the hired man that first day you came. Come, say you forgive me. I know it does not look just right, but down deep in your heart you understand no disrespect was intended or thought of."

"Eloquence—all eloquence! That will do. I am going home. If you will not take me,

I shall walk with my bruised and aching knees," and to show that I intended to do as I said, I slipped off the end of the wagon. But I had over-estimated my ability to carry out my purpose; my poor knees gave way beneath me, and, with a groan of agony, and the tears starting to my eyes, I dropped in a heap on the ground.

Without a word Will Elliott gathered me up and lifted me gently onto the wagon. Then he rested his arms on the wheel and dropped his head on his arms. His face was white and troubled. I looked at that motionless, silent figure until all my resentment and defiance were gone. I did not care if he had made a fool of me. I was sorry. I moved over and laid my hand on his head.

"I am very sorry. Please don't mind. I believe all you have told me."

Still he did not move. Then I wiggled my hand into his and he closed his upon it and held it tightly.

"I know I have been mean," I continued, thoroughly penitent, "but it would make anybody angry if they thought they had been made a fool of a whole summer, wouldn't it? But I understand that was not on the pro-

gram. Then, too, I want you to know that I am grateful. I want to thank you for what you have done. If you had not stopped those frightened horses, where would I be now?"

"Will you please stop! I beg your pardon, but that is a picture I see now—a horrible, hideous nightmare. I don't think I shall ever forget it!"

"Come," I said, to change the subject; "the folks will be anxious. They do not know where we are."

"Yes, I suppose we must," he responded, but making no move to go; "I want to tell you," he went on, "how brave you were. Tom and Miss Roberts knew that you were, too."

"Ah, yes, I want you to tell me about them after we get on the road again." (I did wish he would stop talking about my being brave.) "Please start; Aunt Jane will be worried to death."

"All right, but can I call you Ruth when we are alone?"

"You are the most troublesome boy I know!"

"Please! You don't know how nice it sounds."

"Oh, but I will and so will you if you do not hurry, for the entire population of the neighborhood will be out calling 'Ruth' at the very top of their voices."

"You are the most incorrigible bit of feminine drollery I ever knew," he replied as he went and untied the horses. When he had turned them around we started on our homeward way. There was no seat, so we sat on the floor of the wagon with our backs against the side board.

"Now tell me what you have been doing all these weeks you have been away," I demanded.

"Some time I will. I want to talk of something else now."

"Were you successful in the business you went to attend to?" I asked quickly, for I did not wish to hear this "something else."

"Yes, fairly so."

"Did you make a lot of money?"

"All I expected to—yes."

We had been winding slowly along up the hill. "I wish you would stand up and take a look at the colors down in the valley and up along the hillside. I was so afraid it would all be gone before you came home."

"Did you think of me, and do you want me to see them with your eyes or mine?"

"Why, yours, of course. I thought I knew how much you would like the view."

"Then I will tell you how it looks to me," and he commenced to describe the scene in a low, clear voice:

"High up on the hillside, October has draped her gay, barbaric colors—all the shades and tones of russet, bronze, crimson, and gold are blended together in one bright, beautiful wave. That hillside I shall name this summer, because this summer brought you to our neighborhood. I have known you, Miss Lester, and to know you is the most beautiful thing in my life thus far. Then, down below, next to the plain where the frost has touched the foliage here and there, softening and refining all that gay splendor until it looks like a rare old bit of Persian tapestry almost too precious for the eyes to behold—that I shall name the time when you answer that question which you know I want you to answer. Then there's that dark green strip of cedar trees growing on the plain, nestling in the valley. Green is the color God made for every day use, a color the eyes and heart

never grow weary of, a color that is enduring all the days of one's life. That I shall name the time when you and I are one!"

I looked at him, fascinated with the picture he had drawn and the wonderful sweetness of his expression and the tenderness betrayed in his voice. Then I glanced up the road.

"Look!" and I pointed up the hill. Everyone from both farms was congregated at the top of the hill looking at us. "Hurry the horses, please do; every face looks anxious and troubled." I called to them and said that we were all right.

As the horses walked through the gateway, I caught sight of two automobiles where I had expected to see but one.

"Who can that other automobile belong to?" I wondered aloud.

"That is James', or Mr. Judson's car, I guess," Will Elliott replied. "Your aunt must have a caller. Yes, there he is with the rest."

"Tom and Eleanor! I am so glad to see you both," I said cheerily, but they were not so easily reassured.

Cousin Tom came and helped me out of the wagon. "Poor little girl!" His voice was

husky and I could see that they had put in a bad half hour; they all looked so solemn and anxious. Eleanor was holding one of my hands and Aunt Jane was fluttering around as though she expected me to fall to pieces any minute.

"Are you sure you are not hurt?" someone asked.

"Hurt? No. It was an exciting and exhilarating ride, only the next time I would like to have some cushions for my knees if I am to ride that way. At present they are quite lame and wobbly. I can't say that I like bumping down hill on my knees in an empty lumber wagon, otherwise the ride was quite satisfactory" (more so then I had any idea of telling.)

"Didn't I tell ye not to worry," said Ebenezer (he had been looking his team over carefully), "an' didn't I tell ye that Miss Ruth had more gumption than to drop the reins? Wa'al, I guess not, arter all the instructions I gin her this summer. Some folks use thar brains—then, again, some don't; it makes a dif'rence who they be, how much brain they be born with, an' how they use what they've been blessed with. An' arter I heard William had

got his hands on the reins, why, that warn't nothin' more to worry about. Say, Miss, let me interduce ye to my wife's cousin, James Judson."

Mr. Judson and I did not look directly at each other. I knew that Aunt Jane was watching us closely, so I took a step in his direction, then cried, "Oh, my knees!" (they did hurt) and instantly everyone forgot James or Mr. Judson and began to express their sympathy.

"Say," queried Ebenezer, "whar have ye two been all this while? How far did ye go?"

"Let's go in," I said hastily to change the subject, "my lame knees refuse to hold me much longer," and I started to walk but I was so stiff and sore that I caught Eleanor's arm to keep from falling.

"You can't fool me; I saw you bumped and banged around in that hard, rough wagon and I know you must be black and blue all over if not seriously injured," said Tom, as he picked me up and carried me upstairs to my room.

Aunt Jane bathed my knees and made sure that there were no other bruises, and in a

little while I hobbled downstairs. It was too cold now to sit on the veranda. Aunt Jane brought in hot tea and, aided by the cheerful blaze of the woodfire, the might-have-been accident faded into past history.

Mr. Elliott still kept an anxious expression although he tried his best to be cheerful, and I saw Tom looking at him quite often. Intuition, or something which had been said during the runaway made him venture a guess that was not far from the truth.

Late that evening when all were supposed to be in bed, I sat by my bedroom window. The only light there was in the room came from the new moon. Outside I could see three figures outlined dimly, and from the little sparks of light, I knew that they were smoking. Not long after, two of them went down the garden path and the other came in. I wondered what they had been talking about. I sat there for a while thinking over the events of the day and gradually a great peace, a new happiness stole over me, for I knew that I loved Will Elliott.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEXT morning I made slow haste in dressing. My knees were still stiff and lame, and I almost fell several times at the risk of waking Eleanor who occupied the room that opened out of mine. I happened to glance out of the window and saw James, or Mr. Judson as I was to call him thereafter, and I wondered if I should ever call him Uncle James. He was coming up the garden path carrying a great bunch of wild asters. "Oh," I thought, "they will be just the thing for that tall vase in the hall." He must have tramped a long way after them for I knew where they grew. I could tell by the deep blue color. Evidently Aunt Jane was on the veranda waiting, for his face grew positively radiant as he waved the flowers and hurried up the path and under the veranda out of sight. (I think veranda roofs are a nuisance to curious people on the second floor of a house). For a long time I heard voices,

but not words, as I sat alone in my room, having finished dressing and seeing that I probably was not required downstairs. After a while I became tired of my solitude, for Eleanor still slept the sleep of the just, so I thought I could get downstairs without their hearing me.

I knew the door was open. But my knees still being somewhat ungovernable, causing me to make a misstep, I stumbled and that brought the two on the veranda to see what was the trouble.

"You are just the one I want to see," said Mr. Judson. "Will you let me explain something to you, something your aunt cannot make up her mind to tell you."

"Why, yes." I tried to look innocent, and there was a merry sparkle in Mr. Judson's eyes.

"I will begin at the beginning," he said. "Twenty-five years ago your aunt and I were engaged. Well, we broke the engagement and I went abroad and was gone quite a number of years. After I came home I found that she was still Miss Lester. I have asked her several times to exchange Lester for Judson but you were the excuse. She said she could

not, that she promised her brother to consider you first and always."

"Then," I said, "I think she ought to have kept her word."

"What do you mean?" they both asked in astonishment.

"Why, I have always wanted an uncle, and I think she was very remiss in her duty and rather mean not to give me one." I made a hasty retreat after that—going as fast as my injured limbs would carry me to the garden. After a time Cousin Tom came down the garden path on his way to the house. I called to him and he came down to the bench where I was sitting. I began the subject that was uppermost on my mind.

"Tom, do you know this Mr. Judson very well?"

"It was rumored years ago that he and Aunt Jane were engaged but I guess that was gossip."

"Well, it is not gossip now; I have reason to believe they are engaged—I don't know, but I am almost sure."

"What, our Aunt Jane! You don't mean it! Impossible!"

"Yes, and it is not impossible."

"Father will have this farm removed from the earth. Thunderation, what a calamity! And still more to follow!" As he made the last observation he looked mischievously at me.

"I am sure," I said, "I don't know what you mean by 'more to follow.' What discoveries have you made?" I was not looking at him, but I am afraid the ear next to him was a little red.

"I will not tell you about any discoveries I may have made, but I will tell you that you must not crucify poor old Will beyond the limit of endurance."

"Who has—what do you mean? Who has any idea of crucifying him, I should like to know?"

"I told him years ago that I had a cousin that would bewitch a brick house."

"Um! Discipline is good for mankind."

"Is it? Well, don't be cruel and overdo it. Come, Eleanor is up. I wonder where breakfast and Aunt Jane is? I am as hungry as a Modock Indian!" Then we sauntered slowly into the house where we found breakfast waiting.

"Now is the time to ride around the country

amid the gay and rustling leaves," Cousin Tom said at the breakfast table. "Don't you want to go somewhere in the automobile, Ruth, or are you too lame?"

"Yes, I should like to go. My knees are too lame to walk, but they will ride all right."

He asked Aunt Jane to go but she answered that she would rather not. "Then I will go and ask Will Elliott," said Tom; and in a little while they came back together. Eleanor and I were ready, and soon we were spinning gaily along—Eleanor and I in the back and the men in the front seat. Our road led through a forest, and as we wound in and out Eleanor spied some chestnuts and wanted them, so Tom stopped the car and gathered the few he could find. Mr. Elliott suggested that we turn the automobile in at a cart path beyond where he knew we could find quantities of them. Tom turned the machine around and went quite a distance into the deep woods. I said I would sit where I was while the rest gathered chestnuts. Tom replied, all right, they would keep me in sight. Mr. Elliott, however, said he would keep me in sight by staying in the automobile with me, and though I urged him to go, he stayed.

"Do you know when you are going back to the city?" he began, as soon as the others were out of hearing.

"I really don't know; it all depends upon Aunt Jane. I should like to stay until Thanksgiving, but I am afraid Mr. Judson will spoil my plans."

"I wish I knew positively," he replied.

"Why?"

"Because I must make up my mind about going into business with Tom. I know I can make more money there than here, and I can take the jobs that have the most money in them with me."

"But, what have I to do with it?"

"Everything."

"Why everything? I do not understand."

"Just this much. If you go, I go; and if you stay I shall stay. Tom has been very patient to wait so long."

I was growing annoyed. "I think I shall hate everybody!"

"I think I should rather that you would, than just to *like* me."

This was too much. My nerves were not any too strong after yesterday's episode. I



“Can’t you love me just a little?”

put my head down against the front seat of the auto and cried.

"Please don't! For heaven's sake, won't you stop?" he begged in a distracted voice. "I shall go insane if you cry again today."

I was sorry but I could not stop instantly, and, made bold by his remorse and sympathy, he put his head down close to mine.

"Please forgive me; I did not mean to make you feel badly. I love you so—can't you love me just a little?"

I moved my head to mean yes.

"Are you sure?" His tone expressed so much astonishment. I moved it again to signify yes—this time a little faster.

"Will you look at me?"

I looked just a little; his hand was under my chin and he turned my face towards him.

"Ruth," and his voice dropped to a low tone of passionate entreaty, "are you sure? Am I your all in all? Tell me truly, do you love me?"

"Yes, I am sure," I replied steadily and I returned his gaze fearlessly for an instant, then hid my face again.

It was some time later. The sun was high overhead; the clear October air filled all the

woods, and the trees dropped their leaves of crimson and gold and bronze silently. A bright-eyed chickadee in a clump of laurel nearby sang sweetly, seeming to say he was as happy as we. Down the long cart path we could see Cousin Tom and Eleanor as busy as two children sitting by a great flat rock, pounding out chestnuts from their prickly burrs under a grand old monarch of the forest. There was quite a large heap of mangled burrs beside them, evincing the fact that they had been so occupied for a considerable length of time.

"They are coming," Will Elliott laughed; "How I wish they could stay away a little longer."

On our way home I chanced to remember Great-uncle's message to be read in October. The time had come, and I wondered what it would mean to some of us—could there be anything else to add to my happiness? Who could Great-uncle have remembered? Perhaps he had only the farm, and maybe the message was but a farewell word. So I inquired of Mr. Elliott, or Will (as I now had the right to call him), if the time had not come to read the message.

“Why, yes; I had forgotten all about it. I am glad Tom is here—he is one of your uncle’s heirs, you know.” Then he and Tom talked the matter over and decided to read it after we reached home.

When we got to the house, Will went home and came back with his father and Mr. Judson. We were all together in the living-room. No one but myself knew about the long drawer in the desk and the hidden spring.

Will Elliott gave the message to Tom and requested him to open and read it. All it contained was a description of the desk and the way to find the spring that opened the mysterious drawer.

Ebenezer put his finger on it almost instantly. The others did not notice it, but I knew that he must have been familiar with it. Then the four men examined the contents of the drawer carefully. Mr. Judson was called upon this time to break the seal and read the last message of the dead.

It was a will duly signed and sealed but not written by Will Elliott. Mr. Judson read on. The first one to be remembered was his great-niece, Ruth Lester; to her he gave her grandmother’s picture and ten thousand dollars;

to his great-nephew, Thomas Lester, ten thousand dollars; to his niece, Jane, the farm that had already come into her possession; and all that remained of his estate, real, personal or movable, he gave to his friend, William Elliott, etc.

It was a supreme moment. A silence fell upon all in the room. Everyone was looking at William.

"Are—are you sure?" he asked, overcome with surprise.

"Quite sure," answered Mr. Judson. "Allow me to congratulate you!"

"It is like a fairy-tale," said Eleanor. "The old house, the secret drawer, a message from the dead, and—"

"Yes," interrupted Aunt Jane, her own happiness making her heart to overflow with good-will to everyone; "allow us all to congratulate you," and she gave her hand to William.

Tom had not said a word yet, but stood with his hand on Will's shoulder. They were looking at each other. Finally, Tom managed to say—and there was a huskiness in his voice: "My one and only wish is that Great-uncle may be found to be worth a million!"

I was truly sorry for Will Elliott. He was speechless with emotion and astonishment. He did not dare to trust himself to say anything for the moment, and, as usual, Ebenezer came to the rescue.

“Wa'al, William, maybe it ain't enough to make ye so cut up. Better investigate—an', I vow, William, if it should turn out a likely bit o' property maybe ye can reconcile yerself by keepin' it in the Lester fam'ly! Do ye s'pose he can?” he asked, turning abruptly to me.

William and everyone else looked at me and the laugh that followed put everyone but me at ease.

“‘All's well that ends well,’” quoted Mr. Judson. Then Tom and Will began looking over the bank books and other papers and they made an estimate of something like fifty thousand. That would leave Will about thirty thousand when the ten thousand each for Tom and me had been disposed of.

All the remainder of the day nothing else was talked of. No one had dreamed that Great-uncle had so much money.

That evening out in the dark corner of the veranda when Will Elliott bade me good-

night he said, "I shall give it back to you, dear one; it belongs to you—not to me."

"Very well," I replied; "you cannot have me unless you make up your mind to take that which belongs to me, too. I think, yes, I know, that Great-uncle wanted you to have it, else why did he give it to you? So that's all there is about it. Besides," I added with a happy laugh, "you and all your worldly goods are mine, anyway—or will be!"

CHAPTER XXII

COLD WEATHER had come in real earnest; the wind howled about the house, shaking everything that would rattle or bang. The almost leafless trees tossed their bare branches wildly about and everything was very dismal. Everything was packed up or gone, for we were returning to the city and the farm would be left in Ebenezer's care once more. I had been around the old haunts and said good-bye to everything, so dear to me. I went to the little spring between the cliffs, climbed the rocks and looked down at the stream. The pure, sparkling water flowed out from under the rock just as faithfully now as it did on that hot July day. Spring, summer, autumn and winter it bubbled and sang, never heeding the changing seasons. Down below where the water ran when the spring overflowed and along the hillside, the bare witch-hazel was blooming, its pale yellow flowers and grey, speckled twigs standing out in

sharp contrast to all about. It is the last wild shrub to bloom.

In returning home, I went around by Mr. Palmer's to make the last call for a while. I felt sorry, as I thought how lonesome they would probably be during the long, cold winter, alone on the farm, their son gone, and I wondered if they would not reproach me for it.

As I neared the house, I saw the old gentleman at the wood-pile.

"Wa'al, I'm right glad to see ye!" he exclaimed, as I stepped up and surprised him. "Wife has been looking for ye all the arternoon. Go right in, it's too cold for ye to be a-standin' out here."

Mrs. Palmer and I had a good talk over many things, and when I finally started for home it was getting quite late. Ebenezer was still cutting wood. I could not go until I had had another talk with him, so I went around the woodpile and sat down on the saw horse. After a while, we talked about the money Great-uncle had left William; somehow I had my suspicions that he had known all about it, and I now asked him.

"Wa'al, seein' as how ye an' William be

engaged, I'll tell ye. Your great-uncle was of two minds all winter afore he died, about making his will. Me and William had always been good to him, so he thought, and his relations an' he warn't on extry good terms. He would decide to give his money to William, then again, blood would tell, as they say, and he'd about make up his mind to remember some on his relations. Fin'ly, Judson was over thar with me one day an' we got to talkin' on the subjec' an' he tol' the ole man all about each one on ye—even had a picture of ye an' yer Aunt Jane, both. The Lord only knows how he cum by 'em, I don't! Wa'al, they did the ole man no end o' good, an' the next day he sent for James to cum over, an' he went. James seemed pleased about some-thin' an' arter all the arrangements was complete they tol' me the hull thing, as I s'posed. I was tol' how to open the secret drawer in the desk, an' I was to look arter it in case of fire or anything—but I didn't know nothin' about William's havin' the money. Yer great-uncle took a great fancy to yer picture an' he an' Judson thought if things worked all right, he could give William the money an' still keep it in the fam'ly, an', I vum, I never

did see anything ever work so complete! The hand o' Providence seemed to work the hull thing. Why, jes' think on't! Ye an' William arrived on the same train; then the blamed hosses got frightened an', I vow, thar was William ag'in, all ready to do the rescue. Didn't dream he was within a hundred miles on us, but thar he was, ready an' willin' like a lamb led to the feed-dish. An' it 'twarn't long before Wife an' I knew jes' how the hull thing was a-goin' to end."

"Mr. Judson must have a very calculating mind," I said, not over-pleased.

"Wa'al, yes—an' thar it is ag'in. Who knew he was arter yer aunt? I didn't till arter ye'd arrived an' he wanted to play 'James' the servant. Then I washed my han's of the hull job!"

I spoke of the long, cold, lonesome winter when they would be alone. It filled me with sadness to think of it, and he must have seen how I felt for he said:

"Don't think we blame ye any, child; we be honestly glad on't. Glad to see the boy happy an' started right in life. Why—" (here he dropped his axe and sat down on the chopping-block, facing me) "we feel as Ma-

tildy Batson must've felt at her first husban's funeral."

"Is it a story?" I inquired, hoping it was, for I was feeling rather depressed and welcomed something that would make me feel cheerful and happy.

"Wa'al, yes, I s'pose so. Anyway, it did happen over to the church, for I was thar myself an' heard the hull thing."

"Please tell it to me—I want to hear it."

"Won't ye git cold settin' here on the saw-hoss in this wind? Better go inter the house ag'in whar it's warm, 'cause if I keep ye out here listenin' to my stories an' ye git cold an' be sick so ye can't go to the city tomorrow, William will have me hung, or somethin' e'kely as bad." The funny old face was all wrinkled up with humor at his own fantastic invention.

"Please go on with the story. I want to hear it now and here."

"Wa'al, if ye will stay, it was this way. Let me see—it happened long 'fore William was born—yes, quite a spell before. Wa'al, Matildy had been married nigh onto ten year when her husban' was took sick an' died. Ole Elder Tuke preached the funeral sermon.

The meetin' house was full o' people; everybody turned out an' went 'cause they was both brung up in the neighborhood. It was one on the biggest funerals I ever see in the church—an' I've seen a good many. Why, the yard was full of teams. Wa'al, to go on, the ole Elder fin'ly took his seat. 'Friends,' says he, 'Ye'll find my text between the lids of the Bible.' An' he went on till he gradually got warmed up an' had most of the congregation a-sheddin' tears—he was natur'ly awfully gifted, ye know. Wa'al, all to once he raised his arms up high an' shouted—'An' would ye have him back? Would ye have him back?' Then, as bad luck would have it, he happened to turn his eyes towards Matildy, an' what did that hysterical critter do but shake her head! Then he shouted ag'in—'The sister shakes her head—she would not have him back!' An', I vow, the hull congregation nearly laughed out. I never saw the beat on't. Nobody that was in that congregation that day ever forgot it. An'," he added, turning towards me and looking directly at me with a very tender smile, "Wife an' me feel that way about William, child—we would not have him back!"



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